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STARFINDER®
SECOND EDITION

MURDER IN METAL CITY

BY JENNY JARZABSKI

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Lunar-17 and Nitpick investigate a downed spy drone as they pursue mysterious leads in the neon alleys of Metal City.

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INTRODUCTION

Tier-99-Professor's doom began with the culmination of their life's work: deciphering the purpose of a relic created by the First Ones. Striving Polytechnica recently acquired a collection of mysterious items salvaged from the so-called Wreck of the Returned, an enigmatic and dangerous crash site on the planet Akiton. Many anacites are very curious about the wreck, as they believe the vessel was built by their progenitor culture, which they reverently call the First Ones. If true, the existence of the ship, and the secrets it contains, holds drastic implications for anacites across the Pact Worlds. Being one of Striving's foremost experts on the First Ones, Tier-99-Professor was assigned to solve the riddle of one of the recovered items: a foot-long rhomboid device made of smooth blue glass that flickers with inner fire. After methodical experimentation, the professor determined that the device is some kind of battery.

Another person is interested in the device. Recently, a mysterious interplanetary traveler calling himself Agent Z began hunting down objects taken from the wreck on Akiton. After collecting a series of objects on the red planet, he made a terrifying discovery about the purpose of the devices and changed course, abandoning his hideout and traveling to Aballon. Traumatized by what he witnessed in a different reality, Agent Z believed that if he didn't intervene, he and everyone he loved would perish when a contingent of uncaring beings drained this reality's suns as fuel for dimensional travel.

Posing as a visiting professor from Preluria, Agent Z befriended Tier-99-Professor. The two bonded over their shared knowledge of the First Ones civilization. Agent Z continued to track down other relics, buying some, winning one at a gambling table, and stealing others outright. He tried to bribe, charm, and trick Tier-99-Professor into giving up their relic, but his methods had no effect. Z eventually tried to steal the item after enlisting the help of a seemingly harmless bureaucrat named Prime-Facilitator.

Knowing that valuable relics were going missing, Tier-99-Professor had prepared countermeasures for such an event. Agent Z's heist failed. In a moment of despair, he cast *slice reality*, slaying Tier-99-Professor. But, he couldn't find the relic, which Tier-99-Professor had hidden in a high-security archive.

Recently, Agent Z's been working to infiltrate Archive 404 while Tier-99-Professor's dead body lies hidden inside a storage unit. Agent Z's secret ally, Prime-Facilitator, is covering for Tier-99-Professor's absence and manipulating records of Agent Z's activities. Agent Z's getting close to executing a break-in to steal the final artifact—little does he know that Prime-Facilitator has learned of the relic's value and developed plans of their own.

Thankfully, one of Tier-99-Professor's final contingencies has called the heroes to Metal City—as some visitors affectionately call the sprawling silver megaplex of Striving—sadly, not for a casual reunion, but to solve the professor's murder!

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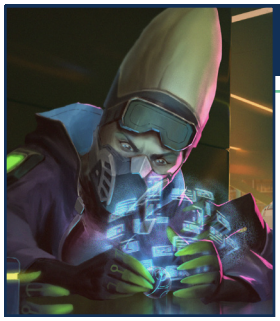
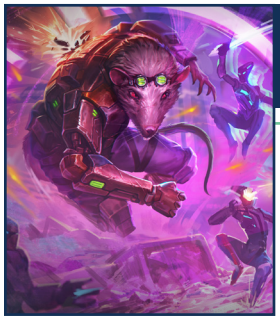


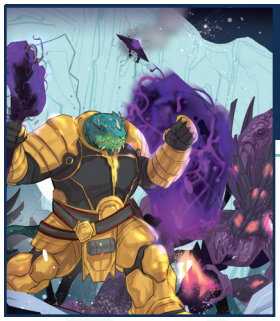
CHAPTER 1: COLD CASE

The characters arrive at a tavern in Striving expecting to meet their old friend Tier-99-Professor. Instead, they receive a final message from the professor—they've been murdered, and it's up to the PCs to solve the crime! A dangerous chase leads through the streets of Metal City to the discovery of a powerful magic-wielding enemy, and tragic proof of the professor's demise.



CHAPTER 2: SEEKERS IN STRIVING

With only a few leads to go on, the characters must set out into Metal City to learn about their friend's strange research into First Ones relics, find evidence of the professor's recent activities, and learn more about who might have wanted to kill them. The PCs must blend in with the rest of the city by working odd jobs as they hack, talk, and sneak their way into any place that might hold clues. All the while, a mysterious figure acts behind the scenes to thwart them, track them, frame them, put them on trial—or get them killed!



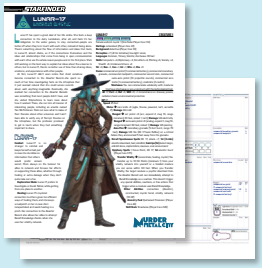
CHAPTER 3: FROZEN HEART OF ABALLON

After gathering evidence and avoiding the worst of the Machine Court's judgment, the characters learn that the perpetrator of the heinous crime has also fled the city and is hiding with a stolen relic in the Ice Wells, deep crevices of frozen jungle far from the bustling metal megaplex. A harrowing journey takes the characters deep into the Ice Wells, where fanatical foes have taken the murderer captive—and wish to learn the secrets of the First Ones relics for themselves! The characters must navigate treacherous terrain, make difficult decisions, and decide the fate of their foe.

The PCs should reach 2nd level at or slightly before the conclusion of Chapter 3—be sure to have a copy of *Starfinder Player Core* on hand if you want your players to level up their characters, and consider adjusting the final encounters (using the guidelines found on the inside cover of this book) if you feel like they will be too easy for 2nd-level characters.

ADDITIONAL COMPONENTS

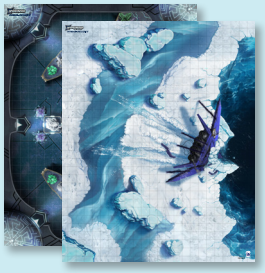
"Murder in Metal City" includes additional components to enhance the adventure experience for both players and GMs:



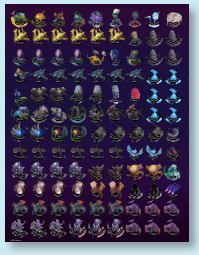
Six pregenerated characters, one for each class in *Starfinder Player Core*. Players can also create characters using *Starfinder Player Core*!

Handouts detailing clues, communications, and pieces of interesting information that arise as part of the characters' investigation.

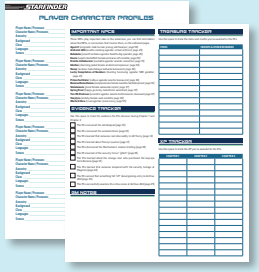
Cards for NPCs the characters meet as well as items they acquire.



A map of the city and double-sided Flip-Mat for combat locations from Chapter 1 and Chapter 3.



Tokens to represent the characters and the enemies they face in battle, including extra tokens to customize your campaign with additional creatures!



A GM Aid handout to track important information and details of the investigation.

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CHAPTER 1: COLD CASE

The PCs have been invited to meet their mutual friend Tier-99-Professor (known fondly to their friends as Tierny) at Analog Cafe, a popular watering hole in downgrid Striving; remember to give the players their invitations from Tierny (**Handout #1: Invitation to Analog**). Then, read or paraphrase the following text.

Air pumps exhale swirls of sickly fog that cling to the feet of skyscrapers and rub against windows like affectionate squoxes. The silhouettes of floating towers are dimly visible through the fog, hovering ponderously over busy thoroughfares as they parade across the megaplex cities, circling the planet's surface in a monotonously predictable path. Agile maintenance bots skitter up and down skyscrapers' slick angular surfaces, gleaming silver in the faltering sunlight. Crowded into a niche on the first two floors of one of dozens of lofty towers lining the streets of downgrid Striving, Analog is a boxy cafe with an overhanging roof and a two-story patio constantly shrouded in thick, swirling gases.

The gases are thick but safe to breathe. They're produced by the nearby air pump, part of a terraforming effort to make the city habitable for organic residents and visitors who might otherwise struggle to acclimate to Aballon's thin atmosphere. Some creatures feel clear-headed and euphoric while breathing this air.

JOINING THE PARTY

As you set the scene for their arrival at Analog, invite the players to introduce their characters, describing their method of transportation, appearance, and behavior as they explore the cafe and settle in at the appointed table. This first scene is a great opportunity for players to introduce their characters (and themselves, if necessary) and get to know each other, while the GM learns how each character behaves. The premade characters included in this adventure all have a connection to Tier-99-Professor, but you can also allow players to create their own characters with their own stories using *Starfinder Player Core*.

After you set the scene, encourage each player to roleplay meeting (or reuniting) with the other characters, explaining that characters coming together as a group, or party, is an important moment when playing a Starfinder adventure.

MISSED CONNECTION

Analog's interior is tastefully shrouded behind panes of frosted glass the color of a sky at late dusk. Inside, a sleek silver console beeps with a friendly tone, inviting the PCs to add their names to the wait-list, check the average wait time (10 minutes and 16 seconds), or claim their reservation. The PCs' names are included in Tier-99-Professor's reservation: a roomy, private table near the back of the tavern.

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If the PCs claim the reservation, green arrows in the floor faintly pulse in the direction of their reserved table. The arrows lead them through the glitzy front room; it's packed with a mix of mostly organic customers and synthetic waitstaff. Guests eat and drink at tables crowded around a sculpted synthwood bar at the center of the room where the skilled android bartender, **Ghellon** (charming jaded female android entrepreneur), mixes cocktails and takes orders.

The arrows turn and lead through a low archway into a smaller, quieter dining space sparsely populated by guests—mostly anacites engaged in intense but silent interactions over the digital communication network all anacites share. Most don't have any food or drink on their tables. The PCs' reserved table sits in an alcove along the back wall, secluded enough to allow for private conversation but close enough to watch the people coming and going in the next room.

Outside, a moss-decked patio is surrounded by a cloud of vapor from two sources: the nearby gas pump and a congregation of barathus, many in business suits and luxury attire.

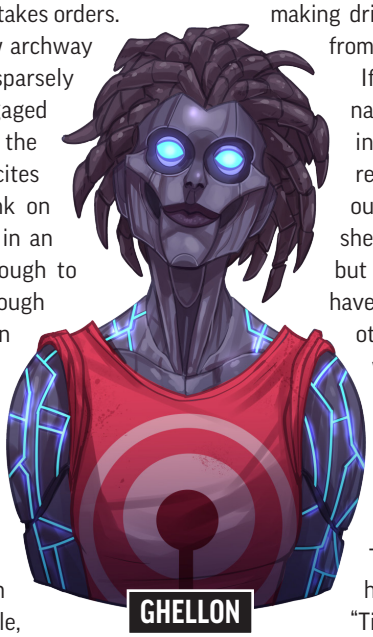
Dinner and a Mystery: Once the PCs are settled, a customizable server hologram appears at the center of their reserved table, and their pleasant voice instructs the guests to complete their dining algorithm using a comm unit to let the chefs know about any allergies or other dietary needs. Food and drinks are delivered to tables by conveyor belts discreetly hidden in the walls. Each table contains a holoprojector at its center with three modes: ambience, off, and vid play.

The chef's organic special is a celebration of seasonal flavors sourced from the local Ice Well, served as a four-course meal consisting of snow cress salad, cave cricket bisque, moss-smoked albino eel, and frost berry strudel—all of which are painstakingly prepared, beautifully plated, and delicious. A vid about the Ice Wells plays at the table, projecting serene scenes of frozen underground forests. Synthetics may opt in to enjoy enhanced features of the vid that are transmitted directly into their minds, including sensations of cold temperature, the smells and textures of local flora, and images of habitats, as well as emotional data simulating the tranquility of the space. Organics can watch the vid but can't directly partake in its special features without a datajack or similar augmentation. The rest of Analog's holovid library is available to patrons who ask, and the PCs can order just about anything on or off-menu on Tier-99-Professor's generous tab.

Late For Dinner: Having recently been murdered, Tier-99-Professor doesn't ever show up. Eventually, the bartender, Ghellon, kindly asks if the PCs need help getting home, saying she's friends with a local autocab and can get them a good rate.

Reward: The PCs earn 10 XP for roleplaying or investigating the scene.

INTERVIEW WITH GHELLON


GHELLON

Ghellon doesn't know when to expect anyone to show up and ask about the holovid Tierny entrusted to her, so she's busy making drinks and running the front end of the cafe from a polished synthwood bar.

If anyone mentions Tier-99-Professor by name or description, the glowing circuitry in the Ghellon's eyes rotates with a tic reminiscent of a camera lens zooming in and out as she processes the data. She admits she's acquainted with Tier-99-Professor but won't say much else unless the PCs have ordered a few items (on Tierny's tab or otherwise). She knows Tier-99-Professor works at Polytechnica Central Files and rests at a nearby charging port.

Tierny's Holovid: Ghellon knows better than to give the holovid to any random stranger who happens to ask about it, but if the PCs speak the passphrase from Tierny's invitation, she produces a compact holovid projector and disk and explains, "Tierny said that if they weren't here to meet you in person, I should give this to you."

The PCs might watch the holovid right away, in which case, proceed to Tierny's Last Words (page 6) and the ensuing chase scene. They might instead ask Ghellon some questions or return to chat with Ghellon after watching the holovid.

How do you know Tierny? "They're a regular customer, but it feels more significant than that. They started coming here about ten years ago during a blackout, and they've been a regular ever since. Well, semi-regular."

When did they give you that vid? "A month ago. I haven't seen them since."

When's the last time you saw them? "Last month. That's when Tierny gave me the vid I showed you. Ghosting isn't especially unusual for them. Tierny has a pattern: they come in a few times a week for a while, then disappear for about a month, then one day they show up again and it's back to their old routine like nothing happened. I always figured they got busy. But they always came back."

Who are their friends? "They're friends with just about everybody. They came in a few nights a week and almost never dined alone. Lately, they were meeting up with a visiting professor quite often—I think his name started with a Z—Zamie, maybe? Colleagues, random barathu tycoons smoking on the patio, you name a category of person and Tierny could find a friend."

Would anybody want to hurt them? "No. Everybody liked Tierny. Even their rivals!"

Where do they spend time? "They work at Polytechnica.

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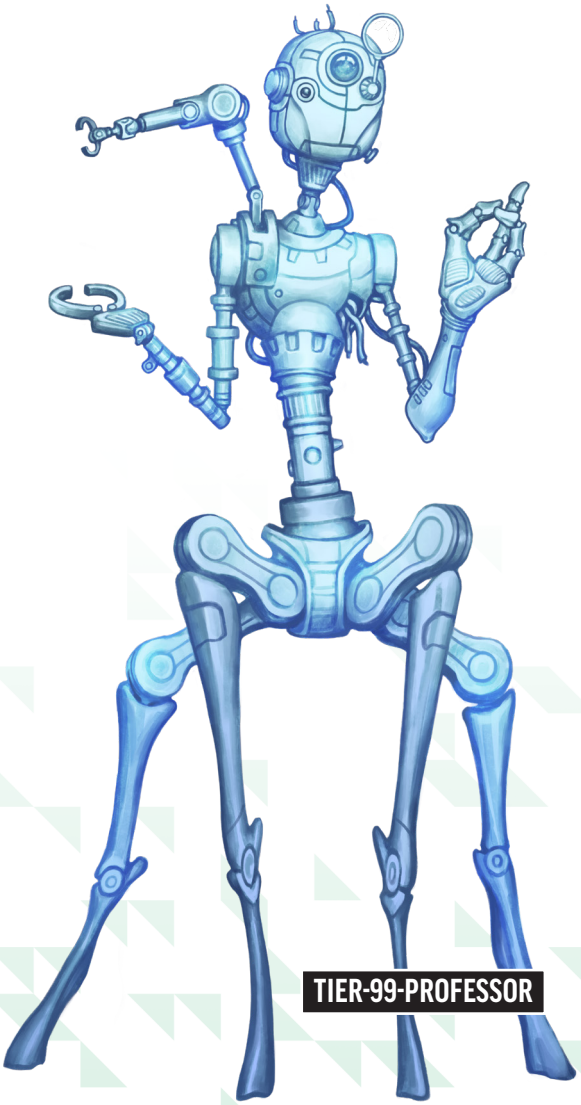
Otherwise, you might find them at their charging platform here in North Circuit."

Where were you two weeks ago? "I work every night unless I'm sick, and I haven't had a cold since I got that immunochip upgrade back in 320." Ghellon has security footage and logs to back this up.

If the PCs show Ghellon the holovid, she's extremely worried about Tier-99-Professor and urges the PCs to do whatever they can to find them. She admits that she hasn't seen Tier-99-Professor in a few weeks, which isn't necessarily cause for concern—they've done this before when they're trying to crack a new relic. She knows Tier-99-Professor was working on a challenging problem at work, but uncharacteristically seemed down the last few times she saw them—in fact, Tier-99-Professor seemed to be avoiding their friends. Previously, Tier-99-Professor met with colleagues from Polytechnica and had recently befriended a human visiting professor. Tier-99-Professor finally stopped coming in, then showed up out of the blue to give her the vid. She hasn't seen them since.

Reward: The PCs earn 10 XP for talking to Ghellon.



TIER-99-PROFESSOR

TIERNY'S LAST WORDS

The PCs might choose to play Tier-99-Professor's recording at their table, or they might find a more secure location to watch the vid. If the PCs leave Analog without watching the video, the chase scene (Downgrid Detour, below) occurs immediately when a drone shoots at them outside the cafe. When the PCs play the message, read or paraphrase the following.

Tier-99-Professor appears as a ghostly hologram speaking in a crackling approximation of Tier-99-Professor's voice.

"Greetings, former companions. If you're watching this, it's because I have experienced an unexpected shutdown—in organic terms, I am dead. I propose you enjoy a meal on my prepaid tab and seek emotional support.

"My shutdown is within the normal range of variability, however it has occurred prematurely and left many of my tasks incomplete. In fact, the reason I invited you out tonight was to share a new theory with you: I am being pursued by a clever adversary who intends to shut me down permanently. I had planned to ask for your protection in exchange for payment. But the scenario has evolved.

"As I no longer have need of protection, I have an alternative proposal for you: solve my murder."

Suddenly a laser streaks through the window, passing directly through the center of the holographic anacite's head in a hard light copy of a kill shot. The image explodes in a frenzy of light and static.

A stealth drone hovering just outside Analog shoots at the PCs, missing all living targets but perfectly striking Tier-99-Professor's hologram in an ominous echo of their fate. The drone flies away immediately, activating its adaptive cloaking module to try to blend in with its metal surroundings. Its camouflage is imperfect while in motion, allowing the PCs a glimpse of a blur streaking away from the window and down the alley across the street.

Resolve the PCs' next actions as a chase scene encounter.

DOWNGRID DETOUR

TRIVIAL 1

First, ask the PCs how they react to the sudden flyby, then at your discretion you can have the PCs roll initiative using a skill related to the activity they described. PCs might roll Perception to catch a glimpse of the shooter, Stealth to duck out of sight, Athletics to jump through the window, or something else. When you know the order in which the PCs will act (and they've triggered any special abilities that activate when they roll initiative), begin the chase scene by describing the drone's first action to zoom away from the window!

Terrain: Some Starfinder chases involve vehicles or starships, but this chase takes place at street level in

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busy downgrid Striving as the PCs pursue a hovering stealth drone on foot.

Running the Chase: This scene uses Starfinder's chase scene rules; the rules explained below are sufficient to run this scene, though GMs wishing to modify or expand on the chase scene can find the full chase scene rules and tips in *Starfinder GM Core*.

ABALLON SPY DRONE

The chase scene involves the fleeing drone and the PCs progressing through a series of obstacles in a specified order. Each round, the fleeing drone makes a specified amount of progress, and each PC may attempt a check to see how much progress they make, as represented by Chase Points. Each obstacle requires a certain number of Chase Points to overcome.

On a character's turn, they describe what they do to help the group get past the obstacle. They then attempt any required roll, or perform the required action for a choice without a check. If they attempt a roll, the result determines how many Chase Points the character gains for the party.

Critical Success The PCs gain 2 Chase Points.
Success The PCs gain 1 Chase Point.
Critical Failure The PCs lose 1 Chase Point.

Once the PCs earn enough Chase Points as a group, to overcome an obstacle, the entire party moves to the next obstacle. Extra points don't carry over, but anyone who hasn't taken their turn yet can act against the new obstacle.

The drone acts first each round, followed by the PCs. The drone flees toward a programmed pickup point. It starts at the traffic crossing obstacle and moves at a rate of 1 obstacle per round; when it completes its turn on the first round, it's at the safety crossing obstacle.

CLOAKING — OBSTACLE 1

Chase Points 2; **Overcome** DC 12 Perception or Survival to notice the drone, DC 15 Crafting or Computers to identify its electronic signature

A flying drone equipped with an underslung laser pistol positioned like a wasp's stinger hovers nearby, then flickers as it activates its cloaking module.

TRAFFIC CROSSING — OBSTACLE 1

Chase Points 3; **Overcome** DC 15 Acrobatics or Athletics to weave or sprint through, DC 13 Piloting to follow the flow

Dozens of vehicles—sleek urban cruisers, hovercycles, all-terrain crawlers, and bulky autobuses—zip through this intersection at high speeds. If you critically fail to overcome this obstacle, you take 1d6 bludgeoning damage as you cause a minor collision.

SAFETY CROSSING — OBSTACLE 1

Chase Points 2; **Overcome** DC 14 Computers or Thievery to hack or rewire the traffic signal; spend a round doing nothing to automatically gain 1 Chase Point, but if you do, you take a –2 circumstance penalty to checks to overcome the following crowd obstacle

A blinking traffic signal glows above the busy intersection, signaling when it's safe for pedestrians to cross.

CROWD — OBSTACLE 1

Chase Points 3; **Overcome** DC 15 Acrobatics or Athletics to weave or push through, DC 13 Society to follow the flow

Throngs of people crowd the streets, making it difficult to continue the chase.

CONSTRUCTION SITE — OBSTACLE 1

Chase Points 2; **Overcome** DC 13 Athletics to jump over or break through barricades, DC 15 Acrobatics or Striving Lore to parkour through the construction site, DC 12 Labor Lore or Stealth to sneak through the workers' entrance

Metal barricades bar the path forward, blocking off a partially completed construction site heaped with piles of scrap metal and other building materials. The drone lazily weaves through the obstacles in your way, but the gaps are too small for most creatures to easily fly through.

HOLO-ADS — OBSTACLE 1

Chase Points 2; **Overcome** DC 13 Computers or Perception to reprogram or disbelieve the holograms, DC 12 Technology Lore to identify the holograms; a ranged attack against AC 12 to damage the holoprojector

A burst of color, sound, and sensation washes over you as noisy holo-ads activate everywhere, targeting you based on an algorithm that analyzes your latest infosphere purchases.

UNDERGROUND MALL — OBSTACLE 1

Chase Points 2; **Overcome** DC 12 Diplomacy to get directions from a shopkeeper, DC 12 Piloting or Survival to navigate out of the complex, DC 13 Society to find your way to the nearest exit

A confusing network of cement tunnels winds through an eclectic collection of shops selling curios, useful gadgets, and trinkets designed to appeal to tourists.

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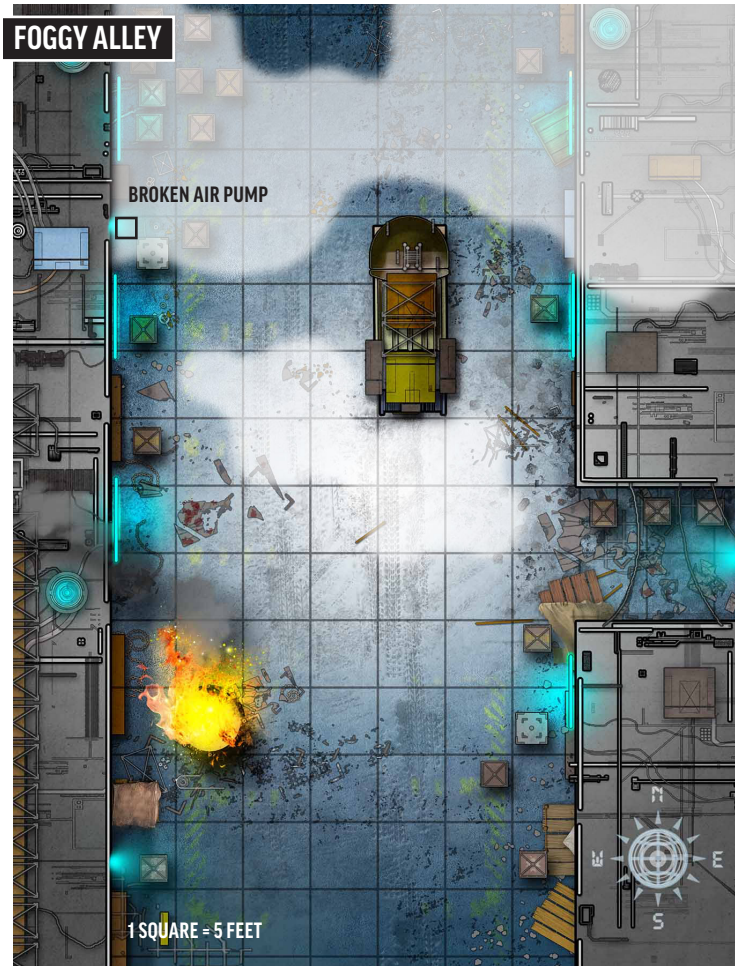

FLOCK OF DRONES OBSTACLE 1

Chase Points 2; **Overcome** DC 13 Perception to identify the correct drone, DC 12 Survival to follow the correct drone's path

A cloud of drones nearly identical to the one you've been chasing glides busily through the street, weaving effortlessly past pedestrians and vehicles on their various errands, moving in a dozen different directions. It's impossible to identify your target at a glance.

Ending the Chase: The chase ends if the PCs catch up with the drone, or at the end of the round when the drone reaches the Flock of Drones obstacle, after the PCs have had one last turn to try to catch up. If the PCs catch up with the drone at any point, they see a shadowy figure in a nearby alley holding out a hand to catch the drone, much the way a falconer would handle their bird of prey—this mysterious stranger notices the PCs and disappears into the shadows a moment later. The drone floats toward the figure's former location, then short-circuits and falls to the ground. The PCs have stumbled on the mysterious figure's hideout and surprised him into fleeing! Proceed to Smog Alert (page 9).

Even if the PCs fail to catch up to the drone before it reaches its destination, they still eventually arrive at the mysterious figure's hideout. However, when they get there, the mysterious figure has already collected the drone and left. Not only that, he's left a nasty surprise behind. Proceed to Smog Alert (page 9) and adjust the encounter using the guidelines in the encounter for a failed chase.

Reward: The PCs earn 40 XP for participating in the chase scene (whether they succeeded or failed), and an additional 40 XP if they caught up with the drone.

GM TIP: COMBAT AND MAPS

Combat is a type of encounter that's typically resolved by fighting. Combats occur when PCs encounter hostile creatures, or when relations with an adversary break down and turn violent. Every Starfinder combat requires a map, which represents where the fight happens, and tokens, representing each PC and enemy in the encounter.

The following encounter uses the map on this page. This location has a map because there's a combat encounter that begins when unruly fog scamps ambush the PCs near a leaky air pump. When the PCs arrive in the foggy alley, prompt the players to place their tokens where they want their character to explore. Prompt the PCs to use exploration mode activities such as Avoid Notice or Scout to investigate the foggy alley. (For more information about exploration mode, refer to the guidelines in *GM Core*.)

Usually, the PCs explore a map or perform other activities before combat begins, so it's more important for players to establish what their characters are doing during exploration mode than trying to anticipate where an enemy might be. If your players catch on to the idea that a map means a fight is coming, you might hold off on showing them the map until it's time to roll initiative.

Next, plan where each enemy is hiding and how they'll approach the group. If you're using a virtual tabletop program or a GM screen, you can place hidden enemies and reveal them to the PCs when the ambush happens. If you can't keep them hidden, keep your tokens off the board for now—you don't want to tip the players off about where the danger is just yet!

When you're ready for the scamps to ambush the PCs, roll for initiative to determine the order in which the PCs and scamps act. You might call out for players to roll initiative using Perception to see how quickly they react to the ambush, or you might have each player describe how their character approaches the situation, choosing a skill to represent their approach (likely Perception or Stealth, but feel free to allow other options).

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SMOG ALERT
TRIVIAL OR MODERATE 1

The mysterious saboteur (Agent Z; page 56) escapes, leaving the PCs to explore his abandoned hideout.

This ramshackle hideout seems out of place in the otherwise orderly megaplex. A lean-to made of a heavy tarp and the roof of an old autobus is wedged between the back stoops of a computer repair shop and recycling center. Trash, stained clothing, and food remnants litter the narrow alley. A thin bedroll peeks out from behind the tarp. Ashes from old fires sit in a metal drum nearby, but the makeshift camp was deserted some time ago, and thick tendrils of milky fog are starting to creep in.

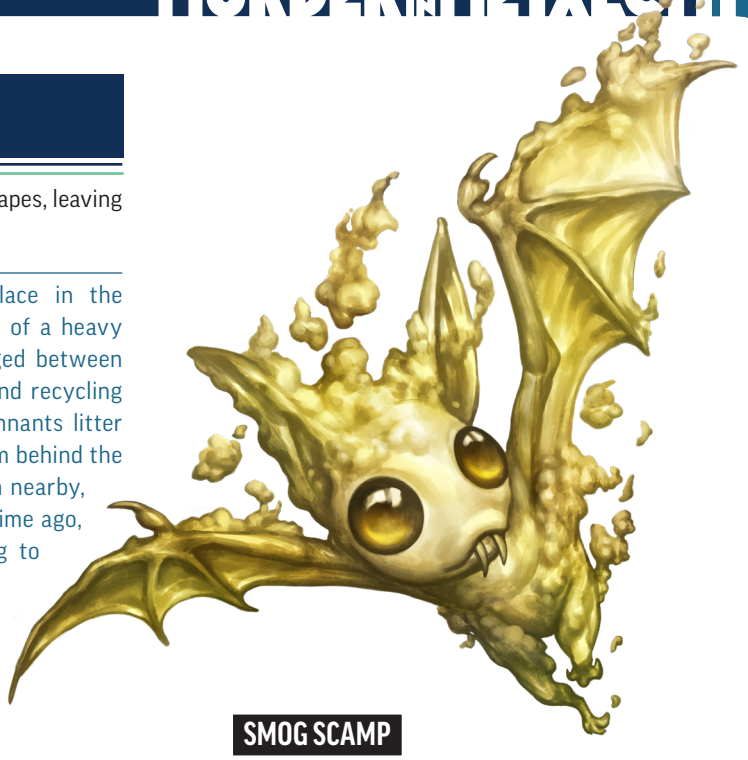
Agent Z has used many hideouts across Striving; this is one of his more brazen ones, as it's not especially secure, but he takes care not to spend too much time here. It's out of sight of the city's many security cameras, so Agent Z prefers this spot over some kind of formal dwelling with intrusive security measures.

If the PCs caught up with the drone, Agent Z flees into the alley and breaks a nearby air pump before fleeing the scene.

Failed Chase: If the PCs failed to catch up to the drone, Agent Z had additional time to prepare countermeasures. In addition to breaking the air pump even further, Agent Z waits around long enough to persuade the smog scamps that his pursuers (the PCs) are to blame. The scamps collect reinforcements, so the PCs face four smog scamps instead of just two.

Broken Air Pump: Clouds of exhaust pour out of a broken air pump (as indicated on the map on page 8). Smog shrouds the area and makes breathing and sight difficult, imposing a –4 circumstance penalty to all visual Perception checks (including rolls for initiative). Smog scamps are immune to this penalty and always count as having lesser cover inside the fog. A PC adjacent to the broken pump can spend 2 actions to attempt a DC 14 Crafting check to repair it, causing the smog to dissipate 1 round later. (If the PCs failed in the chase scene, increase the DC to 16, as Agent Z had more time to cause damage.)

Creatures: Agent Z has been on friendly enough terms with the local smog scamps who inhabit the nearby vents, and he riles them up by quickly breaking their air pump before fleeing the scene. Smog scamps are distant, sickly cousins to common air scamps. Two smog scamps ambush the PCs when they get near the leaking air pump (or four scamps if the PCs failed in the chase scene). They pop out of hidden positions behind terrain and unleash Filthy Fog on as many PCs as possibles, then favor flyby attacks against easy targets. The last smog scamp still alive surrenders if it has 3 Hit Points or fewer.



SMOG SCAMP

SMOG SCAMPS (2 OR 4) CREATURE –1

UNCOMMON SMALL AIR ELEMENTAL

Perception +1; darkvision, fog vision
Languages Common, Sussuran
Skills Acrobatics +5, Stealth +5
Str +1, **Dex** +3, **Con** +0, **Int** –2, **Wis** +0, **Cha** +0
Fog Vision The smog scamp ignores the concealed condition from fog and mist.

AC 15; **Fort** +1, **Ref** +7, **Will** +5
HP 6, fast healing 1 (in smog or polluted air); **Immunities** bleed, paralyzed, poison, sleep

Speed 20 feet, fly 40 feet
Melee ❖ jaws +6 (finesse), **Damage** 1d4+1 piercing
Filthy Fog ❖❖ (air, primal) The smog scamp exhales polluted air in a 15-foot cone that deals 1d6 poison damage to each creature within the area (DC 16 basic Fortitude save). A creature that fails its save is also exposed to foglung. The smog scamp can't use Filthy Fog again for 1d4 rounds.
Foglung (disease) **Saving Throw** DC 13 Fortitude; **Onset** 1 week; **Stage 1** sickened 1 (3 days); **Stage 2** sickened 2 (3 days); **Stage 3** fatigued, can't recover from the fatigued condition, and intense coughing requires a successful DC 13 flat check to Cast a Spell or activate an item (1 week); **Stage 4** unconscious

Investigating the Abandoned Camp: A PC who succeeds at a DC 14 Perception or Survival check discerns that someone has been living here on and off for a few months, evidenced by the food wrappers and trash in the area. They created a makeshift shelter out of the tarp, and they've been scavenging dumpsters and vending machines to get by.

Speaking with Scamps: Though speaking with smog scamps is an unpleasant affair thanks to their tendency

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to wheeze and cough incessantly, the PCs might negotiate with the scamps instead of fighting, or talk to a scamp they capture. If the PCs convince them to talk, such as through use of Diplomacy or Intimidation, the scamps reveal that they don't know the mysterious figure very well. They always called him "the man in the mask," lacking any better name. He's been around for a couple months, but not much in the last few weeks. He had a simple arrangement with the scamps: if they made sure to smog up the area now and then to keep people from wandering through the alley, he'd make sure to bribe the right minor officials to keep them from replacing the vent with a newer model, so it would stay nice and smoggy for the scamps. (A PC who succeeds at a DC 13 Society or DC 11 Striving Lore check understands that the man in the mask was probably lying, and that no such bribe was necessary, as the pump is a minor fixture in an otherwise unimportant location.) The scamps don't know much else. They agree to let the PCs look around.

Treasure: If the PCs search the abandoned hideout, they find some useful gear left behind among the trash. There's an old datapad with a wiped profile named "Z" containing grainy images of people, including their own faces, Tier-99-Professor, and Ghellon, along with a commercial medpatch, a set of microgoggles, and an infiltrator serum. Additionally, if the PCs caught up with the drone, they find it lying nearby; give them **Handout #2: Drone Programming Scan**.

Reward: In addition to XP earned from defeating the scamps, the PCs earn 10 XP for searching the abandoned camp.

Evidence: Note whether the PCs recover the old datapad and wrecked drone on the **Evidence Tracker**.

GM TIP: REWARDS

Overcoming most encounters earns rewards, including equipment and experience that allow PCs to level up and upgrade their inventory. The PCs might not reach 2nd level until the end of this adventure, but you can use the GM Aid handout included with this adventure to track the XP they're earning and items they've discovered to determine when they gain access to new powers.

Whenever the PCs defeat a creature in combat or bypass combat somehow (for example, through negotiation or coercing a surrender), they earn the amount of XP based on the challenge's level in relation to their own, as indicated on the table in the inside back cover. Most encounters also contain Treasure, describing valuable items or useful gear, and Rewards, which include story XP and other special rewards.

GETTING ON THE CASE

A mystery is afoot, and it's up to the PCs to solve it! They'll do that by exploring locations and playing out scenes where they can find clues. Keep track of the clues the PCs find (or miss) using the **Evidence Tracker** on the **GM Aid sheet**. During the adventure, especially key moments in Chapter 2, the story advances in different ways depending on how many clues the PCs have discovered, or whether or not they discovered specific clues.

Going to the authorities at this stage results in a long wait for a brief virtual meeting with **Prudent-Decision** (inflexible agender anacite official), a stuffy anacite bureaucrat who explains that Tier-99-Professor hasn't been reported missing, and is probably performing a task at their workplace, Polytechnica's Central Files (page 15), or resting at their downgrid charging platform (page 11). They suggest searching for Tier-99-Professor there. Sharing Tier-99-Professor's holovid worries them, but they politely repeat that the PCs must follow protocols to "report an error" before the authorities will get involved.

If the PCs return to speak with Ghellon, she doesn't know much about the drones or why they would attack. If they relay the scamps' descriptions of "the man in the mask," Ghellon confirms that Tierny's new friend, the visiting professor, frequently wore a face mask. She thought little of it. "Hang around here a couple minutes and you'll see a dozen far stranger things than a man in a mask." Ghellon reiterates that the PCs might want to check out Tierny's charging platform.

GM TIP: INVESTIGATIONS

Throughout this adventure, the PCs investigate by succeeding at challenges incorporating skill checks, roleplay, or other exploration activities to find clues or leads. If the PCs fail at such a challenge, you might allow them to try again with help from a NPC, or perhaps a particularly close ally automatically succeeds at a task that falls within their area of expertise; for example, Ghellon might hear a rumor and give the PCs information they would have learned through Gather Information, or **Erudite-Collaborator** (page 15) might help them troubleshoot technical difficulties.

Sometimes, failure has consequences described in the adventure. Sometimes failure simply means nothing happens. Success usually earns the party a clue, which might simply be information you read aloud, or could be a player handout you give to the player who discovered the clue.

Some players might enjoy hamming up a scene where everyone's roleplaying a disastrous situation that "fails forward" in a comedic way. Others might prefer a challenging experience in which they feel the consequences of their failures, while some simply want to experience the story and make it their own. As the GM, you can ad lib additional consequences for critical failure, or rewards for critical success. Talk to your players about what kind of gaming experience they want to have. Remember, the goal is for everyone to have fun! Play the type of game you enjoy.

ABOUT ANACITES

At this point, the PCs are likely to start asking questions in or out of character about anacites, their daily routines,

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and their society. Each PC may attempt a DC 10 Aballon Lore or Anacite Lore check, or a DC 12 Society check, to Recall Knowledge, or a DC 12 Diplomacy check to Gather Information. If a character succeeds, give the players **Player Handout #3: Anacite Habits**.

On a critical success, a character also learns the location of the nearest charging platform and its basic layout (Downgrid Charging Platform, below). They also hear (or recall) a rumor that the local charging platform is considered to be an eccentric neighborhood by most of the local anacites.

DOWNGRID CHARGING PLATFORM

This massive, 2,036-foot Y-shaped building towers over the street, piercing the swirling atmospheric gases and casting deep, cool shade on the street below it at fullbright, or darkness at night. In the daytime, its silver-paneled surface turns white hot, and at night it glistens with a cosmos of multicolored twinkling lights. Occasionally, several sets of metal doors in the base of the tower slide open and anacites scurry in or out, flocking to and from the nearby street. It's easy to enter through any of the building's automated doors. A few yards inside, a metal elevator zooms to and from the charging platforms high above at precise 1-minute intervals.

Riding the Elevator: When a creature is inside the elevator, a loud warning pings, accompanied by an announcement for all organics: Aballon's sun is dangerous at fullbright. Riding the elevator is safe, but stepping outside and onto the charging platform exposes a creature to the harsh, hot, unfiltered sunlight, which is harmful for most creatures (see Environment and Weather, page 39).

Exploring the Area: A short corridor leads past the elevator to another set of automatic doors. The building beyond contains a forest of petrified trees. When examining them up close, a PC who succeeds at a DC 14 Mining Lore check or DC 16 Crafting check knows they are actually amethyst and jade pillars intricately carved to resemble petrified trees. A garden of statues is carved to resemble all sorts of creatures cavorting among the trees—anacites, graceful barathus, helpful skittermanders, magical beasts of lost Golarion, and creatures from planets at the other side of the galaxy. Finding the location tied to Tier-99-Professor's identity marker is a laborious process of scanning with a comm unit, datapad, or similar computer while Searching the area. About an hour later, a PC using this method eventually confirms which cell is currently synced to Tier-99-Professor.

SHALALAMULA

Shalalamula (jovial female seksaviak mystic; page 37) lives here with permission from the Insight Array and has free reign over her chosen living space, which she decorated with sculptures she created from polished minerals. Bins full of raw ore are stacked in untidy rows near a huge tumbler that constantly churns rough rocks in its belly and a potbellied stove heating a bubbling stewpot. Nearby, a few rough obsidian boulders form basic pews around a computer terminal where Shalalamula worships Triune, weaving her own eccentric beliefs in with traditional doctrine.

Shalalamula knows exactly where Tier-99-Professor stored their data and shows the PCs if they ask her for help. She wasn't on close terms with Tier-99-Professor, as Tierny was always either tired and in need of a recharge after a long day of work, or excited to begin a new workday and too busy to talk. Still, she respected Tierny's dedication, and has noted their prolonged absence. She wasn't present when Tierny died and is genuinely shocked if the PCs inform her of their demise.

TIER-99-PROFESSOR'S CACHE

Like everything else in Shalalamula's orbit, Tier-99-Professor's cache is an object of unusual beauty. It's a 4-foot-tall plinth of smooth, dull opal carved with graceful concentric fractals. Tiny white flowers blossom in the moss growing over its base, which is lined with minute, capering sculptures of anacites with oddly proportioned bodies (created by Shalalamula). The plinth stands beside a deep well, around which a lush and creeping garden of colorful ferns and fruited vines seeps into the floor's metal tiles.

Tragically, and almost imperceptibly, the opal plinth was perfectly sliced in half; the cut is extraordinarily thin and made at an atomic level by magic.

When a creature or item with the tech trait comes within 10 feet of the plinth, circuitry glows and swirls within the fractals in time to some erratic pulse. Outwardly appearing to be a serene monument, the plinth is actually a locked container with a built-in computer that an anacite can link with wirelessly; any other creature must connect their personal computer to the cache (they can purchase the appropriate adapter for 5 credits from a street vendor outside, or succeed at a DC 13 Crafting check to modify their device's charger to link with the cache).

Once linked, a PC must succeed at a DC 15 Computers check to Hack the console and view any of its data. If a PC

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critically fails this check, the system rejects all further access attempts for 10 minutes.

Memory Storage: Tier-99-Professor's latest activities are self-reported in their memory storage, along with a kaleidoscope of infographic and sensory memories about various topics and experiences with time stamps that seem to span about 3 months of their daily routine. Their only recent activities were study and rest.

The last time Tier-99-Professor used this memory storage was after charging two weeks ago, during fulldark. A PC who succeeds at a DC 14 Computers check decodes an encrypted file with more earnest information about Tierny's activities, including their suspicion that they're being followed, and that someone has attempted to get past the biometric lock on their storage cache (give the players **Player Handout #4: Memory Storage**). Even if a PC fails the check, they can still download this file onto a personal computer and try again 24 hours later, perhaps asking an ally for help or hiring the services of a hotshot hacker.

Object Storage: A PC can open Tierny's object storage by manually unlocking it (requiring two successful DC 15 Thievery checks) or executing the open command in memory storage (if they've successfully hacked it). Tier-99-Professor's crumpled chassis is curled inside the bin in a tight, hunched posture as though they were protecting their vitals and face from an unseen attack when they shut down. One of their hands clutches a note, printed on nanopress and folded with dozens of precise folds to resemble a tiny boat (give the players **Player Handout #5: Note from Tierny**), which instructs the PCs to claim any material objects in this space as partial payment for services they're hoping will soon be rendered—namely, solving their murder and tracking down an important item that might be missing from Polytechnica's collection!

SHADOWY DUPLICATE

Investigating the Body: Tier-99-Professor is dead and can't be brought back. They have no vital signs after shutting down two weeks ago. They are so well preserved, with most areas of their body undamaged, that it requires careful examination to determine their cause of shutdown. A PC who succeeds at a DC 14 Medicine or Perception check notices a nearly invisible, almost surgical wound stretching across one segment of Tierny's abdomen. A PC who succeeds at a DC 14 Arcana, Occultism, or Religion check to Identify Magic discerns from the nature of the damage that Tierny (and the plinth) were destroyed by a powerful spell called *slice reality*, which severed sensitive internal mechanisms at an atomic level.

Investigating Flora: A PC who succeeds at a DC 15 Nature check or DC 13 Life Science Lore check knows that the flora around the plinth are all specimens native to Aballon's Ice Wells, which have been cultivated in the climate-controlled storage network.

Down the Well: The well is a smooth, 3-foot-radius hole bored in the rock beneath the platform's foundation. It drops 20 feet down into Striving's underground infrastructure, a forest of steaming pipes and identical maintenance tunnels twisting into the dark.

Treasure: Tierny left a *commercial null space chamber* full of goods for the PCs. It contains 2 *cellular stimulant* spell amps, a chemalyzer, 2 commercial smoke grenades, a commercial irising shield, commercial carbon skin armor with a darkvision visor, an antiquated shock pad that plays theremin-like melodies, an *akashic download spell gem* (1st rank), a breaching gun, and a commercial starfall pistol with a commercial silencer and commercial battery. They also left 50 credits for each PC.

Reward: The PCs earn 20 XP for investigating the site.

Evidence: If the PCs learn that someone cast *slice reality* to kill Tierny, mark it on the **Evidence Tracker**.

Ambush: After the PCs examine Tier-99-Professor's body and search the area, or as soon as they alert the authorities or call for help, they're ambushed by the perpetrator of the crime—Agent Z—who has tracked the PCs to this location after harrying them with one of his stealth drones in the earlier chase scene, and who uses powerful First Ones tech to attack them.

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STALKER IN THE SHADOWS

MODERATE 1

A booming voice echoes, bouncing off the statues in a melodious disharmony. The voice is accompanied by strange static: "You have no idea what you're involved with. Thus, I give you a final chance. Stay out of it!"

This encounter uses one side of the Flip-Mat included with the adventure.

Hazards: Four staticky images of a masked, hooded humanoid in a heavy hooded coat stand a few yards away from the PCs, spread out in all directions, watching them quietly from the shadows. These strange figures are not really Agent Z—they're interdimensional projections of Agent Z from very slightly parallel realities, sent here by the "real" Agent Z (using reality-altering magic and First Ones tech) to intimidate the PCs. They assail the PCs with reality-warping attacks while Prime-Facilitator's wingbots (see below) record the battle and join the fray.

GM TIP: COMPLEX HAZARDS

The shadowy duplicates in this encounter are represented as a complex hazard. A complex hazard rolls initiative using Stealth, usually after something triggers it; the Shadowy Duplicates use their Quantum Field reaction at the moment they appear, then roll initiative. During combat they follow the routine described in the stat block—in this case, they move around the battlefield and attack using mind-slicing blast. This complex hazard has Hit Points and AC as well as Fortitude and Reflex save modifiers, so the PCs can try to take out the duplicates using attacks and certain spells, especially those that deal damage. Alternatively, the PCs can try to disable the hazard with certain skill checks, as described in the stat block. Full rules for complex hazards appear in *GM Core*.

The players might be confused if some attacks, like a spell that forces a target to attempt a Will save, don't work on these shadowy duplicates. If so, use this as an opportunity to play up how mysterious the duplicates are—perhaps they aren't entirely real!

SHADOWY DUPLICATES — HAZARD 1

UNIQUE | COMPLEX | MAGICAL

Stealth +7 (trained)

Description Four duplicates of a shadowy figure produce a quasi-real quantum field that warps the fabric of reality, then attack with echoes of reality-slicing magic.

Disable DC 14 Arcana or Occultism to disable a duplicate by sealing it away from this reality, DC 15 Engineering Lore or Physical Science Lore to disable the quantum field with contradicting theory, or DC 16 Athletics to disable a duplicate by physical force

AC 13; **Fort** +10, **Ref** +4

Duplicate HP 6 each (BT 3)

Quantum Field ↷ **Trigger** The shadowy duplicates appear and threaten the PCs; **Effect** The duplicates warp reality, creating a quantum field. This field is a 30-foot-radius burst centered on any point within 100 feet of a duplicate, and it's positioned to affect as many PCs as possible. This area is difficult terrain. Then the hazard rolls initiative.

Routine (4 actions) The shadowy duplicates lose 1 action each turn for each destroyed or disabled duplicate. On each of the hazard's actions, a duplicate moves up to 20 feet (ignoring the quantum field's difficult terrain) or moves the quantum field up to 20 feet, then emits a mind-slicing blast against one creature within 40 feet.

Ranged mind-slicing blast +9, **Damage** 1d4 piercing plus 1d4 mental; no multiple attack penalty

Reset The duplicates vanish after 1 minute and never reappear.

Creatures: Two anacite wingbots flutter around the shadowy figures in a protective formation, blocking them from direct line of fire as much as possible. These wingbots have been hacked by Prime-Facilitator, who coordinated this to get footage of Agent Z and the PCs in combat, just in case it's useful in falsifying evidence later (such as to frame Agent Z or the PCs for a crime). The wingbots fight until destroyed.

If Shalalamula is nearby, she doesn't participate in the battle—she hides, emerging to offer healing to the PCs after the fight is over, if needed.

ANACITE WINGBOTS (2) — CREATURE -1

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Initiative Perception +5

Ending the Encounter: The encounter ends when the PCs defeat the wingbots and duplicates. A PC who succeeds at a DC 14 Survival check to Track picks up an old set of footprints leading down the well, but Agent Z hasn't been here in some time. The PCs soon lose the trail when the 20-foot-wide tunnel splits off into a half-dozen narrow spin-offs, some of which are dead ends or meandering maintenance tunnels leading to a waste treatment facility and a condenser station. After getting directions from a startled but helpful anacite laborer, the PCs should realize that the shadowy stalker is long gone.

Reward: The PCs earn 40 XP for catching the first glimpse of Tierny's killer.

CONCLUDING CHAPTER 1

This chapter ends on a cliffhanger! Consider ending your session here, creating suspense and leaving your players with something to look forward to. Otherwise, the session might end when the PCs report evidence of a crime or visit Polytechnica. This is a great time for characters to pursue any downtime activities they might be interested in, or to check in with your players about how they're enjoying the game, help them understand how their new equipment works, or clear up any rules questions. When you're ready to move on with the story, go to Chapter 2!

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CHAPTER 2: SEEKERS IN STRIVING

At this point, the PCs know Tier-99-Professor's shutdown was no accident, and they've encountered a mysterious figure who might be the murderer. Now their primary objective is to solve the mystery. Chapter 2 revolves around that investigation.

The PCs likely start by visiting Tierny's workplace, Striving Polytechnica. If the party hesitates or gets stuck, NPCs they've already met encourage them to begin by querying Insight Array directly or visiting its headquarters at Central Circuit—this is also where they end up if they try to go to the authorities. If the PCs linger around the downgrid charging tower or return there, they encounter a dozen drones scuttling over the crime scene gathering evidence and running diagnostics. The drones ignore the PCs, redirecting all questions to Insight Array's Processor facility in Central Circuit. The drones communicate in Trinary, which sounds like a baffling combination of beeps, static, and other electronic noises to the uninitiated.

Once the PCs visit these initial locations, they likely end up downloading the Insight Array comm unit app, which results in them receiving work assignments from the city's officials. The PCs have a hidden enemy embedded in Striving's government: Prime-Facilitator (page 36), who's working to secure the transistor relic for their own purposes, and who gladly ties the PCs up with mundane tasks and risky "special assignments" in an effort to slow their investigation or (ideally) get them killed.

The PCs can approach the investigation however they like and search the locations presented in this chapter in any order. This investigation likely takes place over multiple days—allow the PCs to spend downtime as appropriate, to work mundane Insight Array jobs, and remember to intersperse the "special assignments" at appropriate times to keep the story moving and keep the tension high.

As the PCs find evidence and accomplish tasks, the GM should track this information in the Evidence Tracker section of the GM Aid. At the end of the chapter, Prime-Facilitator frames the PCs for the theft of the transistor relic, among other crimes. When they're brought in for trial, the Machine Court's judgment about the PCs' innocence or guilt depends on how diligently they've been investigating up until now.

If the PCs need a place to rest, they can call on a friendly NPC. Shalalamula is happy to let them camp out among her sculptures, or Ghellon can call in a favor so they can crash for a while in a one-room apartment near Analog.

STRIVING POLYTECHNICA

High-speed automated trains connect Polytechnica's scattered campuses, so it only takes a few minutes to get around. A PC who succeeds at a DC 13 Computers or Diplomacy check to Gather Information learns that Tier-99-Professor worked at Polytechnica's Central Archives alongside an assistant nicknamed Eruco.

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KHIZAR

CENTRAL ARCHIVES

A complex of archives, servers, and museums acts as reference libraries for Polytechnica's analysts and researchers. Central Files collects digital and hard copies of physical media—antique scrolls, vintage vids, and starmetal circuitry etched in ancient stone—plus enormous virtual libraries explored by immersive viewing pods. Nanopress, paper, and other physical media are stored on the ground floors; specimens are contained in basement levels, and holoprojector chambers on the upper levels connect to an extensive virtual library, with digital copies of all records and objects housed within. Public access to everything except the virtual library is restricted, but PCs might gain access by befriending a Polytechnica worker (such as Eruco) or succeeding at a DC 18 Computers check to Hack their way in (gaining similar information to what they can obtain from speaking with Eruco; see below).

Scholarly attendants and librarians manage the many collections and conduct research with guidance from their peers (and Insight Array). Staff are mostly anacites, androids, and SROs living in the utilitarian "ports" nestled alongside the curve of the main campus, with a few organic transplants visiting or assisting with research part-time while living in off-site apartments.

The PCs are free to explore Central Archives and browse the publicly accessible virtual library, which contains a preview of everything stored within the massive facility, but getting anywhere with their investigation requires authorizations visitors don't have. Asking about the professor or poking around the campus gets Eruco's attention. A short time after the PCs begin poking around, the friendly anacite invites the PCs down to vending services for a chat.

VENDING SERVICES

Located in the basement, vending services is a large room full of vending machines offering everything from prepackaged ready-to-eat "R2E" meals to consumable medical supplies. Cafeteria-style tables provide dining space, and a set of washrooms down the hall offers a place for organic students, professors, and visitors to do their biological functions. A glass door opens to a small courtyard containing a surrealist xeriscape and rock garden. If a PC eats a snack or meal here and succeed at a DC 12 Diplomacy or Perception check, they learn a rumor about "The Prof" acting erratically at work before leaving for deepsync. They can also meet with Tierny's colleague Eruco.

A Chat with Eruco: Eruco, short for **Erudite-Collaborator** (excitable agender anacite researcher), recalls Tierny's most frequent conversation topics were the First Ones and the wreck on Akiton. For the last few weeks before their shutdown, they were preoccupied with a mysterious stalker who they believed was following them. After security foiled an attempted break-in (but never caught the perpetrator), the professor insisted the item they were studying be moved to a more secure facility. The "transistor" relic was placed in Archive 404, a high-security containment warehouse for dangerous or especially precious relics, along with two other objects classified as "orb" and "piston." The next day, Tier-99-Professor entered deepsync to analyze their research—they must have experienced shutdown during that time. Eruco suggests the PCs start the process to get permission to investigate Archive 404 immediately, as it could take some time to get clearance (see page 22)

Eruco's telling the truth, knows nothing about the murder, and genuinely wants to help the PCs solve the mystery on behalf of their dear colleague. If asked about the name Zirem or Tierny's visiting friend, Eruco remembers the Prelurian professor but admits they never learned much about him—only that Tierny spent time with him off campus.

There aren't any records of Zirem or a visiting professor from Preluria at Polytechnica, and a PC who succeeds at a DC 13 Computers check realizes the records have been expertly tampered with by someone with a strong grasp of technology. On a critical success, the PC realizes the tampering was most likely an inside job by someone with very strong security credentials.

Before the PCs depart, Eruco brings up Vazylyza, who he recalls hassling Tierny in the time leading up to his disappearance. She kept loudly offering to buy priceless First Ones relics for her personal collection—and Tierny wasn't the only First Ones researcher she harassed. She was persistent enough that she was able to win a relic from a disgraced researcher in a gambling bet—according to rumor. Eruco knows Vazylyza likes to gamble at Magenta Amusement Orbital Plate, known as just Magenta to locals (page 22), a hovering night club built on an orbital plate that slowly travels Striving.

Treasure: A PC who spends time in the courtyard can attempt a DC 14 Perception check to notice a stone in the rock garden that's been recently repositioned. Moving the stone reveals a hidden vending pass with 3 credits left. The vending pass allows PCs to take unlimited food and beverage items from vending services. Each credit can be exchanged for any common level 0 or level 1 magic or tech item worth up to 100 credits.

CLINIC

Upstairs and down the hall from vending services is a small clinic and 6-bed triage center for organic lifeforms. A holo pops up offering free wellness exams and low-cost medical procedures. Any PC who wants an exam is seen by **Peppup** (kindly male ysoki nurse), who diagnoses any ongoing conditions (such as fatigue) or afflictions (such as a disease or curse) and assesses the character's general health. If Peppup diagnoses a condition, he offers to treat it for half the normal cost, or free if the character has no credits. If they're healthy, he asks if the character is interested in receiving a free augmentation, eagerly showing off a digital catalog of options to anyone who's interested.

Treasure: A PC can get an augmentation (up to 2nd level) at half price if they agree to have the device implanted as part of an educational program, which are performed by student practitioners in an instruction amphitheater. The medical center only implants one augmentation at a time and requires a patient to wait 6 weeks before another implantation.

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PROCESSOR (CENTRAL CIRCUIT)

Configured into a massive transparent cube that's brightly illuminated by light-emitting diodes, Insight Array's Processor is located at the exact center of the Central Circuit district. Automated walkways and escalators speed the journey across miles of bustling corridors packed with drones and workers, taking only about 20 minutes to get from any Central Circuit entrance to Processing.

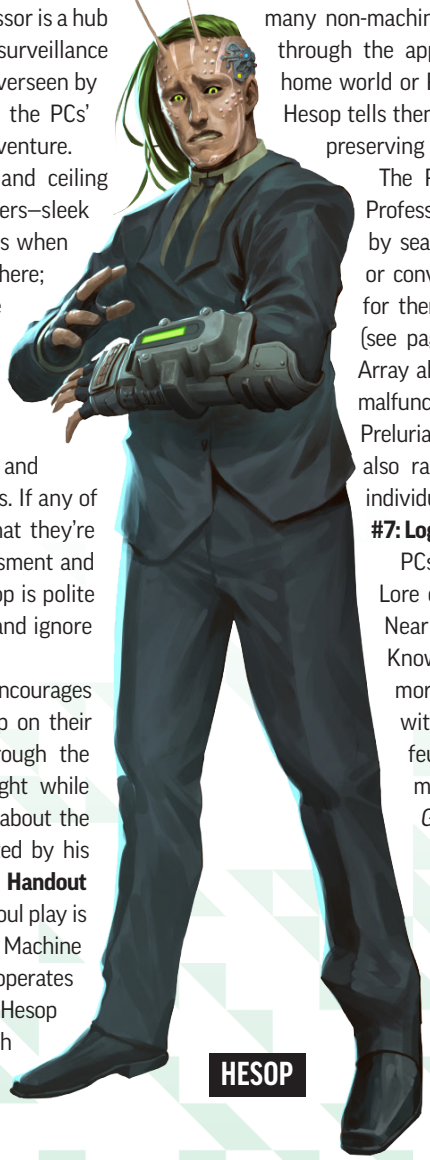
Machines bustle inside the transparent walls of the cube, a diorama of clean lines and silence suspended at the center of frenetic halls. Behind the one-way glass is a seamless white box with smooth surfaces lit by warm, soothing light. An overseer machine hangs suspended from a web of tubes and fiber-optic cables, humming mechanically as it silently processes data. Below, an elegant reception desk blocks access to the banks of computers and servers beyond.

As its name implies, Central Circuit Processor is a hub for processing assignments, queries, and surveillance conducted by Insight Array. The facility is overseen by the currently designated Prime-Facilitator, the PCs' hidden nemesis throughout much of the adventure.

Niches and nooks in the walls, floor, and ceiling contain workstations for the facility's laborers—sleek terminals that blend into their surroundings when not in use. There are no drones operating here; instead, the workers communicate with one another electronically and handle intra-office deliveries manually.

Creatures: **Hesop** (anxious male damaya lashunta bureaucrat) intercepts the PCs when they enter. He stutters a greeting and apologizes that Processor isn't open to tours. If any of the PCs take offense to his assumption that they're tourists, Hesop is overcome with embarrassment and showers them with earnest apologies. Hesop is polite and efficient if they treat him courteously and ignore his blunder.

If they haven't already done so, Hesop encourages the PCs to download the Insight Array app on their comm unit—he's happy to walk them through the process. He won't let them out of his sight while they're inside Processor. If they ask Hesop about the case, he says it's currently being investigated by his colleagues. Hesop shares the information in **Handout #6: Investigation Status**. Hesop says that if foul play is determined to be the cause of shutdown, the Machine Court will judge the case. The Machine Court operates on a strict schedule in a secure location, and Hesop informs the PCs that they can't speak with the court's officials unless they're called to participate in a judgment.



HESOP

Security: Like everywhere else in Central Circuit, Processor is under constant technological surveillance and teeming with specialized anacites who act as the eyes and enforcers of Insight Array. Everything from lighting to workers' pathing inside the complex is connected to a wireless security network, allowing authorized workers to change the flow of traffic to stop a fleeing criminal or activate loud alarms to warn their peers in nanoseconds.

If the PCs critically fail to Hack any terminal or database in Processor, the cube's soft lights flash red while an alarm pitched to cause sensory discomfort blares. Two anacite protectors (page 49) arrive in 1 minute and force the identified threat to leave or subdue it. Harming a worker or purposefully damaging equipment also triggers the alarm.

Rewards: The PCs earn 30 XP for talking to Hesop and downloading the app.

THE PROFESSOR'S QUERIES

When anacites need guidance, they sometimes query Insight Array through their shortwave connection, similarly to how many non-machine visitors and residents ask questions through the app. Any PCs who list Aballon as their home world or Port of Call likely know this; otherwise, Hesop tells them. One of Processor's minor functions is preserving transcripts of all such queries.

The PCs can review transcripts of Tier-99-Professor's recent queries made to Insight Array by searching the database (DC 16 Computers) or convincing Hesop to locate the information for them by improving his attitude to Helpful (see page 36). Tier-99-Professor asked Insight Array about the following topics: biometric lock malfunction, Polytechnica security protocols, Preluria, and Akiton wreck. Tier-99-Professor also ran searches for information about two individuals: "Vazylyza" and "Zirem." See **Handout #7: Log of Tier-99-Professor's Queries**.

PCs who are trained or better in Piloting Lore or Society know Preluria is a planet in Near Space. A PC who successfully Recalls Knowledge (DC 14) using either skill learns more context: Preluria is a gas giant with many moons wracked by constant feuding between the world's factions and mercenary groups (see *Starfinder Galaxy Guide* 19 for more information).

The PCs can Gather Information about the Akiton wreck by attempting a DC 12 Computers or Diplomacy check. On a success, a PC learns that a mysterious ship recently crashed there; early analysis and exploration link it to samples of First Ones technology taken from ruins on Aballon. Artifacts salvaged

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from the wreck have already arrived on Aballon, and Striving Polytechnica is responsible for determining their function and keeping the objects secure.

Vazylyza's public record shows she registered as a visitor to Striving two months ago. According to her infosphere social pages, she lives in a trendy upgrid neighborhood. She posts frequent updates featuring photos of food, fashion, and scenery she's enjoying. Spending hours combing through her posts or succeeding at a DC 14 Computers check to parse the data faster reveals her hobby is collecting pre-Gap tech relics, and she likes taking selfies with her newest acquisitions, which she sources from specialty auctions, or as she posts several times, "from a friend ."

The name "Zirem" is a dead end. No formal records are associated with the name.

Rewards: The PCs earn 20 XP for reviewing the transcripts.

Evidence: Note whether the PCs learned about Tierny's queries on the **Evidence Tracker**.

INSIGHT ARRAY

When the PCs visit Processor in Central Circuit, they're invited to download a special comm unit app that connects them to Insight Array. Androids, SROs, and other constructs can download the app directly into their neural network and receive the alerts telepathically. This representative of Insight Array takes the form of a helpful chatbot that answers basic questions about Aballon and anacite society. When the first PC downloads the app, give them **Handout #11: About Insight Array App**.

The app grants a +2 item bonus to checks made to Recall Knowledge about these topics, as well as Piloting or Survival checks to get around Striving and Aballon, and Society checks to Decipher Writing on Aballon.

Insight Array's app icon resembles three interlocked spheres, each with a digital eye. It runs in the background to monitor geocache data in real time and send pop-up alerts about important tasks or local news. Insight Array contains a map of Striving with pathways to major locations.

Perhaps the most important function of this application is to assign work to each resident and visitor on Aballon. The dense population and high level of automation means many jobs are redundant, and each PC is limited to working two standard four-hour shifts per week. Everyone's basic needs are met on Aballon, but performing tasks as directed earns more material benefits.

No Opting Out: Some PCs might avoid downloading the app. In this event, the PCs receive official government communications directing them to download the app. These begin as formal notices to their comm units, and if the PCs don't comply, the notices escalate to visits from drones, video calls from government workers such as Prudent-Decision (page 10), then in-person visits from government workers accompanied by security forces (such as anacite protectors). All of these visits and demands are justified as "standard protocol." The PCs don't know it, but Prime-Facilitator is monitoring them and working behind the scenes to ensure they get caught up in as many menial and time-consuming tasks as possible (or, preferably, that they get killed while attempting to complete a "special job").

The PCs or players might balk at the idea of performing side jobs while they're in the middle of a murder investigation. To encourage their participation, you might have a character realize (such as through Recall Knowledge) that this is truly how things work in Striving, or you might have a friendly NPC explain the same. You might also have the PCs realize that someone "on the inside" is manipulating things behind the scenes, and you (or an NPC) could suggest that the PCs might gain valuable clues (not to mention credits) by doing work for Insight Array.

WORKING FOR INSIGHT ARRAY

Insight Array endeavors to assign appropriate work to everyone, using a lengthy survey to determine an individual's experience, skills, and preferences. Even if they don't finish the survey, the algorithm sorts the PCs based on their trained skills. For PCs with more than one of the listed skills, the GM might determine randomly or allow the player to choose which type of jobs they want their character to do: Computers (report to Central Circuit where they'll work as data analysts); Athletics or Crafting (technician jobs helping drones with construction projects and repair infrastructure); Diplomacy or Deception (event planning in Striving for conferences and festivals); Medicine or Performance (work at a hospital for organic lifeforms); Arcana, Academia Lore, or Occultism (work at Polytechnica as associate researchers); Religion (work at one of the temples in the Theology Channel, where they help conduct services or teach curious anacites about their faith); Intimidation, Piloting, or Warfare Lore (assigned to Firewall as guards). The GM should set appropriate DCs using the **Setting DCs** guidelines on the inside back cover.

Treasure: Each PC earns 20 credits per standard 4-hour shift worked (up to 40 credits per week per PC).

Special Jobs: In addition to their regularly assigned shifts, Insight Array quickly informs the PCs that they seem like "good troubleshooters" and requests they complete special jobs that grant extra rewards. Of course, the true force behind this determination is Prime-Facilitator, who wants these special jobs to result in the PCs' demise. There are two special jobs in this adventure: Parade of Faiths (page 18; **Handout #15: Special Notice! Parade of Faiths!**) and Pest Control (page 20; **Handout #16: Special Notice! Pest Control!**).

THEOLOGY CHANNEL

The PCs first visit to Theology Channel is most likely when they're working a special job from Insight Array at the Parade of Faiths, though they might visit Tierny's memorial before that. All faiths from *Starfinder Player Core* (page 35) except the Devourer and Lissala are represented in the Theology Channel, as well as many other popular Pact Worlds and Near Space faiths. Eloritu's shrine (which doubles as the Hidden Truth Apothecary) contains a lead relevant to the PCs' investigation—they'll likely visit the apothecary after finding the mysterious keycaps at Tierny's memorial.

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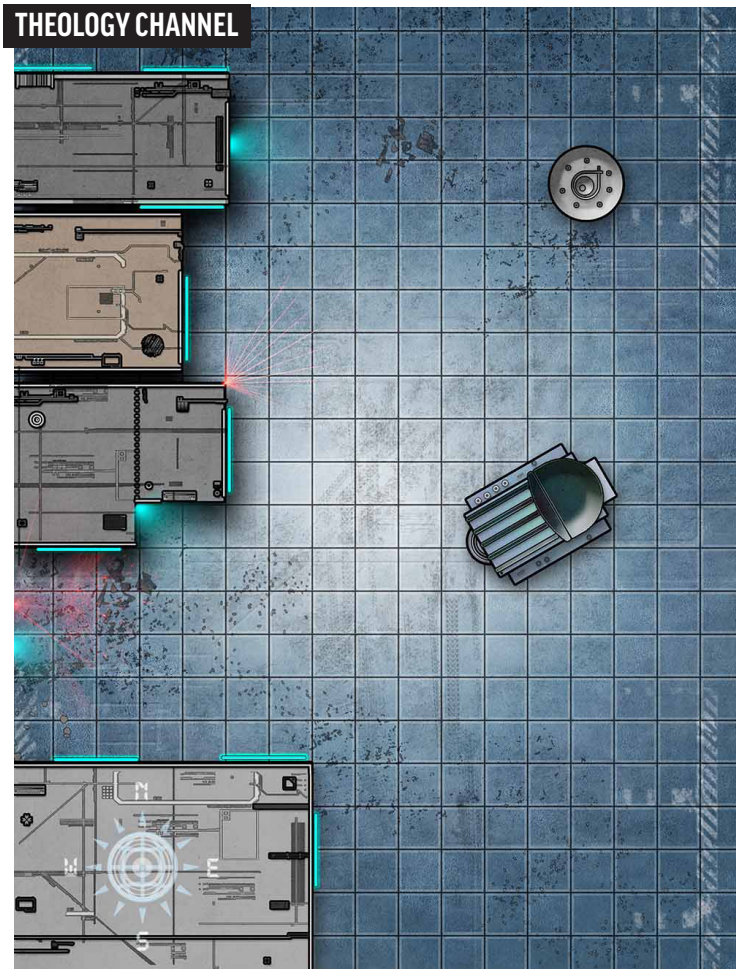
THEOLOGY CHANNEL



PARADE OF FAITHS LOW 1

Insight Array sends out an alert about the upcoming Parade of Faiths, encouraging everyone to attend the interfaith festival in Theology Channel. The PCs receive an assignment tailored to their skills. When they arrive to work at the parade, each PC should attempt a DC 14 skill check using one of the skills associated with their work assignment to prepare for the festival; for example, technicians might install speaker systems while event planners set up booths and schedule activities or parades.

PCs who fail this check are too preoccupied getting their jobs done and take a –2 circumstance penalty to their initiative roll when a group of mechanizers suddenly attack the procession about 20 minutes later! The civilians and onlookers begin to panic, and—strangely—no authorities arrive to stop the mechanizers. This is the doing of Prime-Facilitator, who manipulated the mechanizers into attacking to put the PCs in danger (and rerouted the responding security forces to the wrong location).

Hazard: The panicking crowd impedes movement. The first time on each character's turn that they attempt a move action, they must first attempt a DC 13 Athletics or Acrobatics check. On a failure, the crowd shoves them 5 feet in a random direction before their action. On a critical failure, they lose the action. A character can attempt a DC 13 Diplomacy or Intimidation check as an action to direct the crowd, preventing them from shoving anyone for 1 round. After two successful attempts to direct the crowd (or a critical success), it completely disperses. Because the crowd is trying to get away from the mechanizers, the mechanizers aren't affected by it.

On the third round of combat, if the crowd is still present, they trample the PCs in their effort to flee the mechanizers. Each PC must attempt a DC 13 Reflex save, then the crowd disperses.

Critical Success The character takes no damage and gains lesser cover until the end of their next turn.

Success The character takes no damage.

Failure The character takes 1d6+2 bludgeoning damage.

Critical Failure The character takes 2d6+4 bludgeoning damage and is knocked prone.

Creatures: Three mechanizer saboteurs attack the festival. While their attack may seem random, their intended targets are the PCs, as Prime-Facilitator has manipulated the mechanizers into thinking the PCs are their enemies. These mechanizers are new converts to the cause, and they believe (quite incorrectly) that this mission is a "test" of their loyalty. They fight aggressively and don't surrender.

MECHANIZER SABOTEURS (3) CREATURE –1

Page 51

Initiative Perception +4

Strange Mission Briefing: If the PCs manage to capture one of the mechanizers and succeed at a DC 15 Intimidation check, the mechanizer admits that the three of them received a message beamed directly to their comm units. They believed, of course, that it came from a force called the Singularity, even though they usually receive such communications telepathically—this message was "special" and "just for them." It instructed them to attack the procession, but specified each of the PCs as the "true" targets of the attack. The PCs can also learn this information by inspecting the mechanizers' comm units and succeeding at a DC 13 Computers check to Hack the device.

Reinforcements: A few minutes after the battle, a squad of anacite protectors (page 49) arrives (far too late) to keep the peace. If the PCs speak with them and succeed at a DC 15 Diplomacy check, they can learn that the anacites initially heard that the mechanizer attack was occurring about ten blocks away, and only after arriving did they learn that a rare glitch had sent them to the incorrect coordinates.

Evidence: Note whether the PCs discovered the mechanizers' mission briefing and learned of the security forces' "glitch" in the **Evidence Tracker**.

Rewards: The PCs gain an additional 10 XP for facing the crowd, plus 10 XP if they dispersed the crowd by redirecting it.

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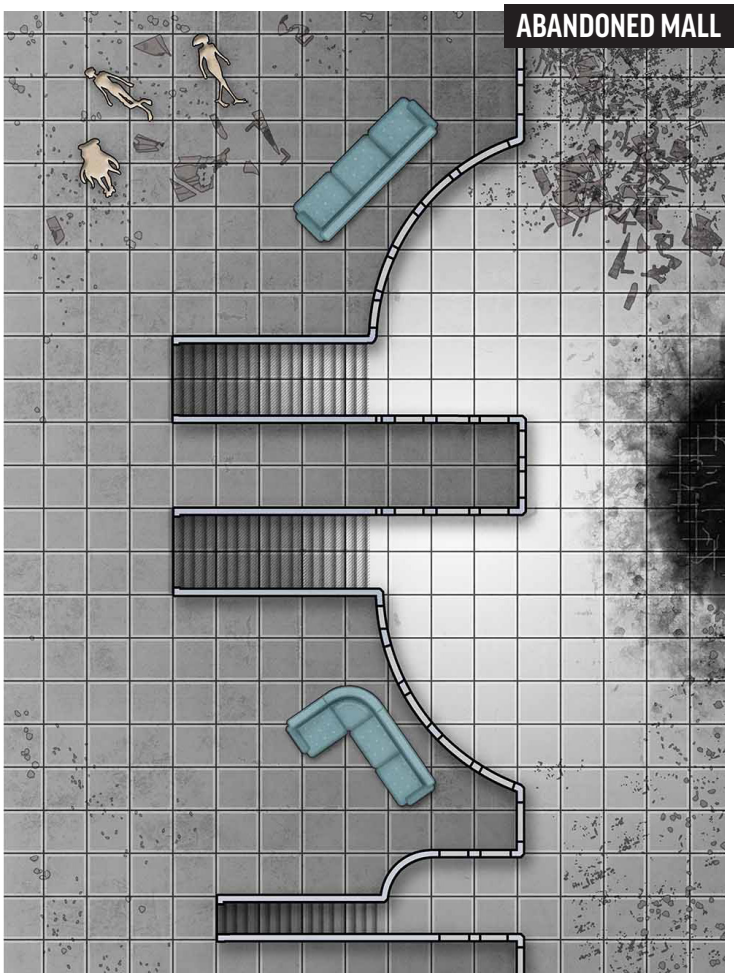
MEMORIAL FOR A SOULLESS MACHINE

Some of Tier-99-Professor's acquaintances have created a memorial where the Theology Channel runs parallel to the great Unification Cathedral, facing outward to greet as many people as possible.

Holos shimmer above a niche in the metal wall that's been painstakingly carved with delicate fractal patterns. An unseen device projects images of Tier-99-Professor along with representations of their personality code into the air around the scene, so that it looks like a flickering, translucent version of the anacite is standing beside the street waving at passersby. Foodstuffs, trinkets, and UPBs are scattered on the ground below the memorial.



Anacite Customs: A PC who succeeds at a DC 15 Diplomacy or Religion check, or DC 13 Lore check (such as Engineering Lore, Anacite Lore, or Aballon Lore) knows more about anacites' customs around death. Give players **Handout #8: Anacite Death Customs**. Anacites don't hold funerals or create memorials, don't have souls, and don't attribute importance to their mortal vessels after "shutdown." With proper maintenance, anacites are functionally immortal. If an anacite's chassis is irreparably damaged, it's recycled back into Aballon's foundries to create a new generation, or to bolster the hulls of great starships or form cradling walls for vast megaplexes. The most devout priests of Triune might be honored by having some of their parts recycled into upgrades for Epoch's neural network, which is viewed as a sacred blessing. In the case of an unexpected shutdown like Tier-99-Professor's, the deceased's tasks are reassigned, and the community quickly adapts.

A ysoki PC, or a PC who succeeds at a DC 14 Society check, knows that leaving gifts for the dead is a common ysoki tradition; on a critical success, they know the items are both intended to help the deceased on their journey to the next life, and for needy bystanders to take if it can aid in their survival. This tradition is attributed to Lao Shu Po.

Strange Gift: A PC who uses *detect magic* or succeeds at a DC 14 Perception check notices a chain of chunky plastic beads among the gifts; a PC who succeeds at a DC 13 Arcana check identifies it as a set of *consecrated keycaps* for a datapad. A PC who succeeds at a DC 14 Religion check identifies the symbols on the caps as some of Eloritu's known symbols. There's a note tied to them that says "Sorry" in spidery handwriting.

HIDDEN TRUTH APOTHECARY

One of many haphazard additions to the orderly anacite architecture of Theology Channel, this rickety wooden shack on 15-foot stilts is built of sun-bleached driftwood reinforced with concrete foundations and metal struts—sticking out like a sore thumb from the algorithmically perfect architecture crowded around it. Inside is a cramped two-story space with narrow halls, creaking staircases, and vintage Kasathan cabinets full of dusty tomes, magical baubles, fragrant apothecary jars, and bizarre specimen tanks.

Hidden Truth Apothecary is tended by Remena Rema Umana of Clan Kalar, who introduces herself as **Remena** (compassionate female kasatha herbalist-priest). If the PCs show her the keycaps, Remena confirms they were blessed at her shrine. She remembers the practitioner who brought them in a few days ago. He kept his head and face covered, but his body shape was humanoid, and he had a service drone with him. He was staying out in the wilderness—it's not safe out there, and Remena is worried. She thinks he must have taken that unfortunate anacite's shutdown hard, because he purchased those keycaps for the memorial the last time she saw him.

Evidence: Note whether the PCs learned about the strange man who purchased the keycaps on the **Evidence Tracker**.

Rewards: Award the PCs 20 XP for speaking with Remena.

Treasure: PCs who establish a cordial relationship with Remena can help at the shrine for a day and attempt one of the following checks, all DC 15: Chemistry Lore, Medicine, Nature, or Religion. On the first success, she gives them a low-

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level commercial grade healing item (a medpatch, hypopen, or similar). The second time the PCs help her, she gives them a programmer's plushie (*Player Core* 285) that looks like a purple squox with one of Eloritu's symbols painted on its belly.

PEST CONTROL

LOW 1

Insight Array sends out an alert across Striving that travel outside Firewall is restricted. Everyone is urged to seek shelter due to confirmed sightings of dangerous wildlife.

Insight Array offers the PCs an urgent special job: Head to an abandoned mall a block outside Firewall and contain or eradicate the dangerous fauna there. Insight Array shares the coordinates and a few grainy satellite images of an unidentified creature. A PC who succeeds at a DC 14 Nature check recognizes the creature in the grainy pictures as a sharpwing (page 52) and can Recall Knowledge about it. A PC who critically fails identifies it as a local cryptid.

Sharpwing nests in the area are uncommon, but not especially dangerous to a city as highly advanced as Striving, which has many means of handling such threats. The PCs are being sent on this dangerous mission, of course, because of Prime-Facilitator's meddling; Prime-Facilitator knows the security network at the mall went offline years ago when it was abandoned by the hopeful franchiser who leased it from AbadarCorp, and hopes that the PCs might conveniently disappear. Use the map on page 19 for this encounter.

Creatures: A colony of sharpwings sheltered in a ruined mall after they were driven out of their Ice Well roost. The sharpwings swoop down to attack the PCs, darting behind cover when they aren't mauling targets or using flyby attacks to swipe at the PCs with their razor sharp talons before zooming back to cover, or a new target.

YOUNG SHARPWINGS (3) CREATURE -1

Page 52

Initiative Perception +8

Treasure: If the PCs search the area they find an auto-CPR unit, a commercial hacking toolkit, a commercial repair toolkit, and a reusable grenade shell.

MAGENTA

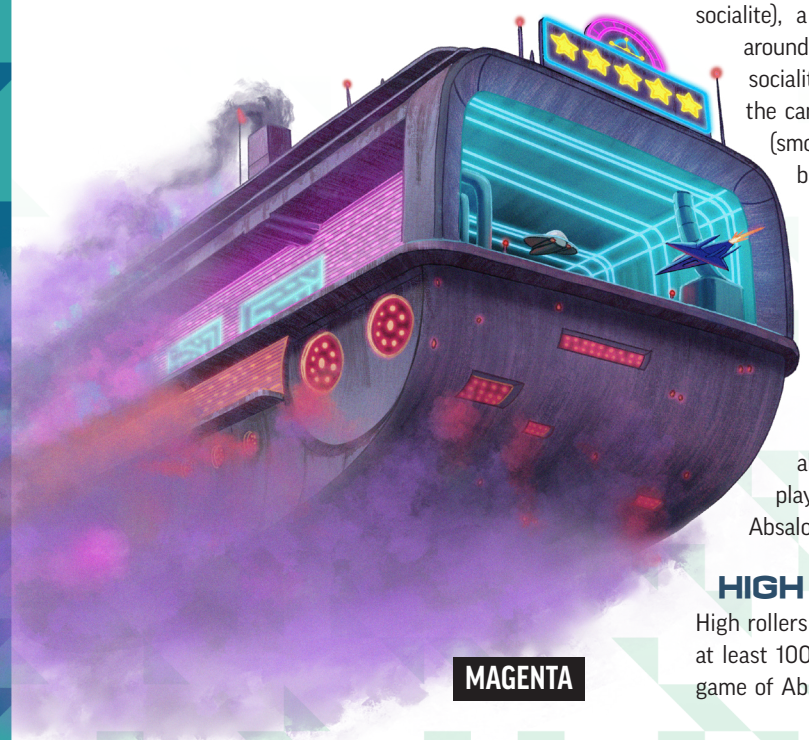
This smooth slab of oily steel shimmers with a sheen of colorful light as it glides through the air, its colossal face cutting through the haze like the prow of a mammoth barge.

High rollers and thrill seekers shackled to the wheels, tables, and arcades of this massive amusement complex test their luck at all hours of the day and night as the neon casino glides over Striving. Sleek VIP shuttles and bulky hoverbuses ferry patrons up to a docking platform, where grand archways open into a wonderland of thrills and material excess.

If the PCs ask about Vazylyza, they learn that she has a private booth in the VIP lounge and that she's notoriously snobby and is unlikely even to acknowledge the PCs' existence unless they can somehow impress her.

VIP Area: Behind a translucent wall of shimmering pink energy is a sparsely populated section with a few roomy booths large enough to seat an entourage. Beyond are private rooms veiled by ornate floor-to-ceiling screens embedded with jewels and glinting with kaleidoscopic holo patterns.

The VIPs lounging here are **Vazylyza** (snobby female vesk socialite), a luxuriously attired vesk throwing her wealth around; **Enaria** (vapid standoffish female azrinaran elf socialite), an impeccably dressed void elf coyly posing for the cameras that follow her everywhere; and **Bebubelu** (smooth reckless agender barathu big spender), a barathu wearing a crisp business suit expertly tailored to their unique body.



MAGENTA

INFINITY DECK

The PCs may wish to engage one or more NPCs in card games—whether to earn a few credits, get on the NPC's good side, or just to have a little fun. While you can use simple dice rolls and roleplaying to resolve these interactions, you can also use the *Starfinder Infinity Deck* to engage your players in real games of strategy and chance, such as Absalom Ante, Mercenary 11, or Contraband.

HIGH ROLLER APPROACH

High rollers can get Vazylyza's attention by making a bid of at least 100 credits at the gambling table, such as during a game of Absalom Ante using the *Starfinder Infinity Deck*. (If

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you don't want to play a card game, you can instead roll a DC 18 flat check; on a success, the PC earns back their bid, plus 100 extra credits. On a failure, they lose it all.)

The PCs might try to get close to one of Magenta's other VIPs. Getting close to Bebubelu requires getting their attention with a DC 15 Diplomacy check or a DC 14 Perception check to recognize them as an Analog regular (the PCs gain a +1 circumstance bonus for having visited Analog, or +3 if they regularly stay there; if they've already become acquainted with Bebubelu, recognition is automatic and requires no check).

Getting close to Enaria requires sneaking past her bodyguards (DC 16 Deception or Stealth) and then charming her with a DC 14 Intimidation check (she likes people with a rough image) or a DC 15 Society check (she also likes important people).

Both VIPs know Vazylyza and can hook the PCs up with a meeting in her private booth. Both remember meeting Tier-99-Professor the night Vazylyza dragged them to the gambling table in hopes of tricking them out of the relic she wanted—she failed, and the straight-laced anacite professor stuck out like a sore thumb. Vazylyza was disappointed, but things were cool until some guy in the bar started a fight with Vazylyza, telling her to back off or stay out of it. Neither VIP remembers details, but they describe a human in fancy but unremarkable clothing who disappeared just as quickly as he caused trouble. Somehow, the security vids didn't catch his image.

If a PC spends time chatting with the VIPs, Bebubelu launches into a drunken but technical explanation of how barathus reform their internal organs to process alcohol more slowly, allowing them to stay intoxicated longer and experience stronger effects without harm. Enaria shows her new acquaintance satellite image of a "property" she's planning to develop outside the city, which appears to be near an Ice Well. She says the wildlife has been more active lately and would appreciate it if the authorities would do something about that.

Thrill Seeker Approach

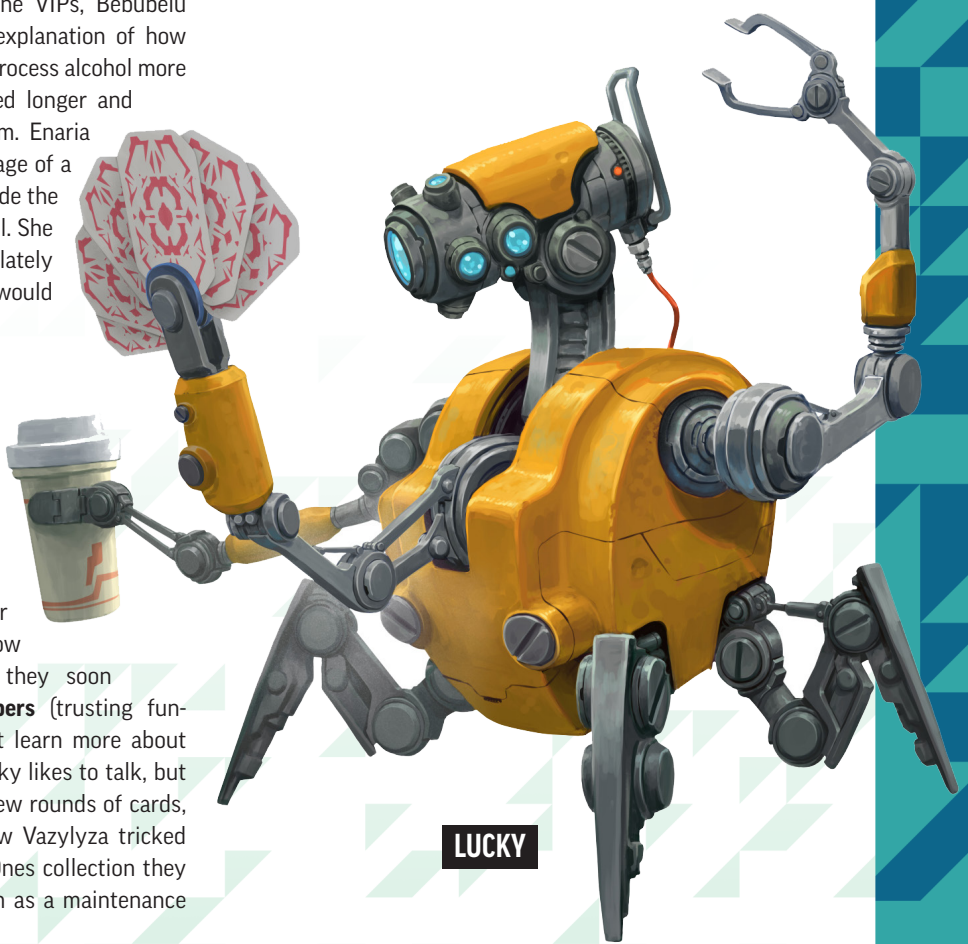
Thrill seekers can get Vazylyza's attention by beating her at her own game, requiring a successful DC 16 Deception, Gambling Lore, or other relevant skill check.

If the PCs prefer to lie low and Gather Information, listen for rumors, or throw themselves recklessly into gambling, they soon encounter **Lucky Compilation of Numbers** (trusting fun-loving agender SRO gambler) and might learn more about how Lucky was tricked by Vazylyza. Lucky likes to talk, but he likes card games a lot more. After a few rounds of cards, Lucky shares the shameful story of how Vazylyza tricked them into bidding relics from the First Ones collection they had access to in their former occupation as a maintenance worker at Polytechnica. Lucky doesn't think Vazylyza would hurt anyone, but admits she isn't trustworthy. Lucky was at Magenta the night a mysterious patron threatened Vazylyza—moments after she tried to con Tier-99-Professor out of a relic—and can relate or confirm the VIPs' story.

Bold PCs might simply confront or attack Vazylyza without investigating first. Vazylyza isn't a combatant and takes grave wounds if attacked by the PCs' attacks, spells, or other damaging abilities. She surrenders and doesn't fight back, and dies under sustained fire. If a PC commits violence, a squad of anacite protectors (page 49) arrives to neutralize all threats to the peace in 1d6+1 minutes. If they're caught, the PCs are brought before the Machine Court to face appropriate charges.

Wrapping Up at Magenta

Vazylyza talks to the PCs if cornered or if they catch her attention. She tracks her location for safety reasons and can prove her exact whereabouts every minute of every day of the few months she's been on Aballon—she saw the mysterious stranger who lashed out at her again about a week ago. It was a weird encounter—he got up and nodded at her with this weird, crooked smile and left. There was a mechanical flower left behind at the bar where he'd been sitting and a note that said "Sorry." She kept the note (it has the same handwriting as the note from the memorial) and the device



LUCKY

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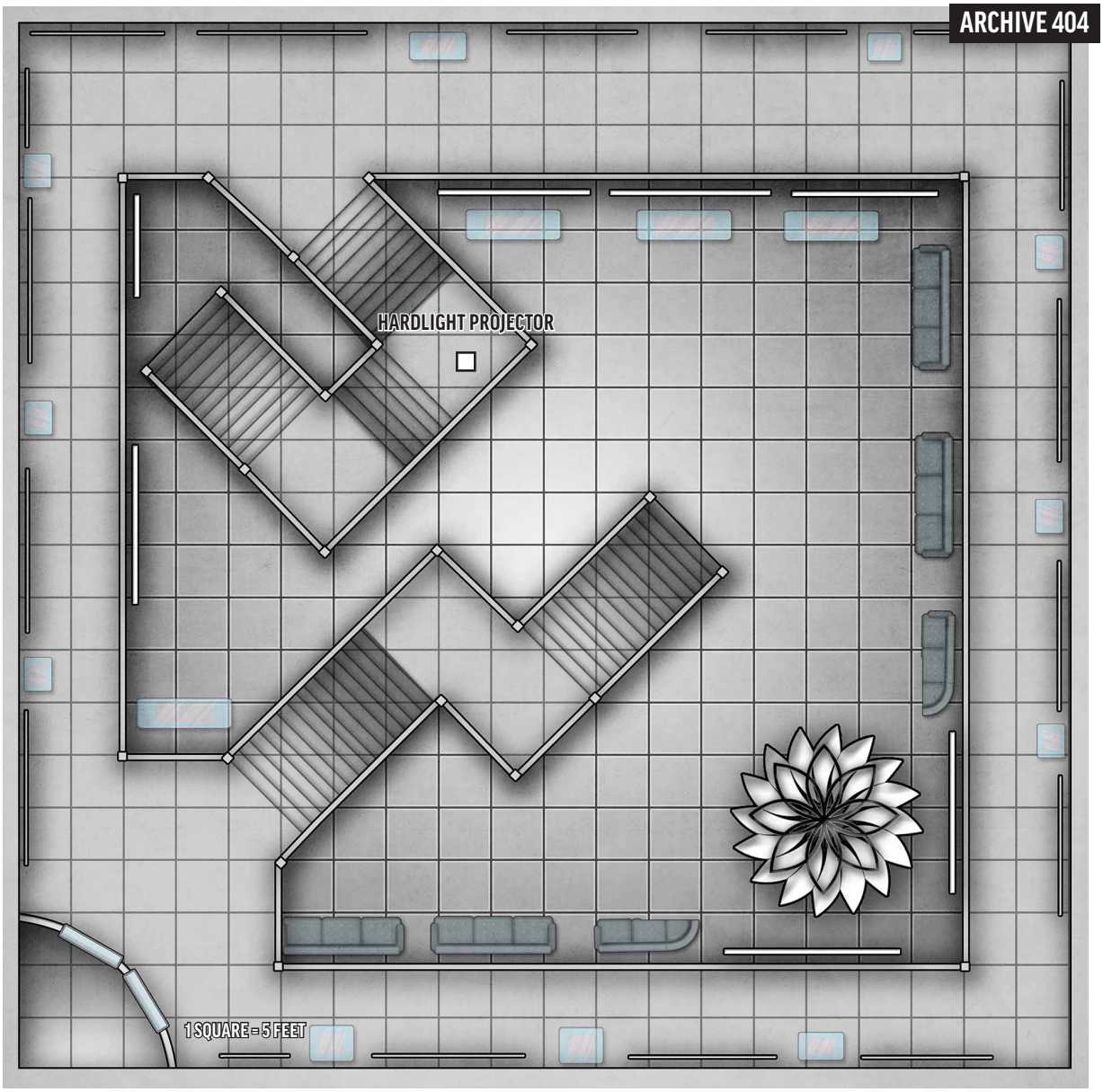

(it's junk fashioned to mimic a First Ones style relic). Vazylyza quickly recognized the fake relic, but a PC can do so with a DC 16 Crafting or Society check, or DC 14 First Ones Lore check. Strangely, whenever Vazylyza tries to check security footage to learn more about the stranger, she finds that he either doesn't show up on camera, the vids are "restricted," or the vids don't exist at all.

At this point, Vazylyza isn't a suspect, and the PCs' only lead is the mysterious patron who got into a fight with her—who the PCs likely suspect is the same mysterious antagonist who keeps popping up throughout the investigation.

Evidence: Mark on the **Evidence Tracker** whether the PCs discover that someone tampered with the security footage at Magenta.

Rewards: Award the PCs 80 XP for investigating Magenta, plus 20 XP if they discover evidence of tampering.

ARCHIVE 404

Archive 404 is a secure facility deep in the basement levels of Central Archives. Only a few authorized security staff have access to the facility, and getting in should be a challenge for the PCs. The party can choose to suffer through the lengthy bureaucratic process required to gain access (social characters who enjoy intrigue might prefer this approach) or infiltrate the facility (characters who excel at Stealth or combat might prefer this approach).

ALL TOO EASY

Prime-Facilitator is aware the PCs are trying to access Archive 404—in fact, it's part of the anacite's plan to frame them! Whichever of the following approaches the PCs take, they find their way into Archive 404 if they accumulate four

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successful checks (a critical success counts as two successes). If they get in on their own, each PC can attempt an additional DC 15 skill check that you feel is appropriate to their method of entry (such as Diplomacy if they're talking their way in)—on a success, the PC notices that something feels "off," almost like someone is working behind the scenes to ensure they make their way in. If the PCs don't accumulate four successes by the time each PC has attempted at least two skill checks, the PCs still find their way in (thanks to Prime-Facilitator's manipulations), but the PCs can't attempt checks to notice that something feels off.

Infiltration: Seamless steel walls and an electronic security system protect the fragile or dangerous items stored in this building. Use the following as guidelines and be flexible in the approach the PCs take: DC 15 Computers to Hack a database and download the archive's floor plan or security codes; DC 14 Crafting or Engineering Lore to copy a key; DC 13 Deception or Stealth to infiltrate or scout the area before the operation. Expending a useful spell or item also counts as successful prep.

Intrigue: Layers of bureaucracy stand between the PCs and permission to enter Archive 404. Gaining permission to visit the archive requires a total of four successes using any of the following checks made in preparation. Each check represents a day of effort; a critical success only takes a few hours, allowing that PC to attempt a second check the same day if they wish. PCs may Aid another's check, but doing so means they can't attempt their own check that day. The PCs might: search for loopholes or leverage knowledge of academic bureaucracy (DC 14 Academia Lore or Perception); Gather Information (DC 13 Computers or Diplomacy); fill out paperwork (DC 13 Computers or Perception); forge documents (DC 15 Computers or Society); call in favors or charm officials (DC 14 Diplomacy); con officials (DC 15 Deception); or strongarm their way in (DC 14 Intimidation DC).

Evidence: Note on the **Evidence Tracker** whether the PCs sense that something feels "off" about gaining entry to Archive 404.

SEARCHING THE ARCHIVE
MODERATE 1

Archive 404 contains thousands of sensitive files and fragile or hazardous objects. Objects are categorized into exhibits: museum quality displays alongside climate-controlled storage organized by a general topic, such as Arshalin, Akiton, or Ubiquity. A thorough search would take weeks; with the help of an archivist, it might take hours.

Archivist 404 (erudite mocking agender virtual archivist) is a virtual intelligence (VI) built into Archive 404's security network. Archivist 404 is a virtual presence linked to software in the hardlight projector indicated on the map. It knows if the projector is destroyed or its program uninstalled, it will cease to exist, and tries to protect itself by distracting the PCs from the projector. Prime-Facilitator put Archivist 404 on high alert as the PCs approached the archive; even if they have permission to enter, it unleashes the facility's security countermeasures when the PCs arrive.

Security: Archivist 404 controls the wireless security network, which includes tiny, sleek cameras that dangle like mechanical spiders from fiber-optic webs (Perception DC 15 to notice) in every corner of every room; treat it as being able to see throughout the entire complex for the purpose of detecting creatures.

Hazard: Archivist 404 activates security measures as soon as intruders are detected.

ARCHIVIST'S WRATH — HAZARD 1

UNIQUE | COMPLEX | TECH

Stealth +7 (trained)

Description This network of security cameras, wall-mounted retractable turrets, and laser nets are controlled by Archivist 404, who commands them to blast intruders with extreme prejudice.

Disable DC 13 Computers (trained) overrides the security program; DC 15 Crafting or Thievery (trained) disables the hardlight projector; DC 17 Diplomacy convinces the Archivist to reconsider. Four total successes are required to end the program.

Projector AC 14, **Projector Hardness** 2; **Projector HP** 24 (BT 12)

Intruder Alert! ↷ **Trigger** Archivist 404 detects intruders; **Effect** Dozens of tiny nodes concealed in the walls, floor, and ceiling unleash a kaleidoscopic barrage of lasers that deal 1d6 fire damage to all non-hardlight creatures in Archive 404 (DC 15 basic Reflex save). Then the hazard rolls initiative.

Routine (1 action) Archivist 404 fires one laser at each intruder in the archive as one action. It takes a cumulative –1 status penalty to its attack rolls for each successful check the PCs have made to disable it.

Ranged laser +9, **Damage** 1d6+3 fire; no multiple attack penalty

Reset Every 6 hours, a backup program restores Archivist 404's original personality data to the projector if it's been disabled.

Creatures: Archivist 404 is hostile and commands two hardlight dragonets to materialize and attack the PCs. These creatures fight until destroyed, or until Archivist 404 is disabled, which neutralizes them.

HARDLIGHT DRAGONETS (2) — CREATURE 0

Page 50

Initiative Perception +6

If the PCs disable the hazard, Archivist 404 stands down. The archivist apologizes for the inconvenience; it and any remaining hardlight dragonets help locate any item in the archive or review records in minutes. Archivist 404 has an arrogant, stuffy personality and maintains a great deal of knowledge about the items stored in its archive.

After defeating or disabling Archivist 404, the PCs have access to the database and quick search features. They can

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instantaneously locate any item in Archive 404 based on a few key words (like "First Ones," "Akiton," and "Tier-99-Professor"). It's easy to find the display where the relic should be.

But when they open the display case, the relic is noticeably missing. According to security logs (which the PCs now have access to), no alarms were triggered and security footage shows nothing suspicious other than their own entrance. The relic was accounted for in this morning's inventory check—the only possible conclusion is that it must have been stolen today—worse, the PCs are the only registered visitors to Archive 404. When the PCs come to this conclusion or attempt to leave Archive 404, proceed to "Framed!"

FRAMED!

The PCs have been framed for a crime they didn't commit and were trying to prevent!

Flashing lights, insistent angry beeping, and frantic clicking of metal shutters fill the senses as a wave of security drones and camera-toting crews engulf the premises. An alarm blares somewhere nearby and suddenly there's shattered glass on the floor as the display case bursts apart. The buzz of magic creeps along the skin like a shiver and disappears, leaving only the clamoring security drones forcing themselves between the suspects and the presumed crime scene.

ARCHIVIST 404

Prime-Facilitator already helped Agent Z steal the relic and took steps to frame the PCs for the theft—including Agent Z's expert use of First Ones tech to rip pieces of another reality into this one, turning a pristine museum display into what looks like the scene of a robbery. A PC who can cast *detect magic* or is trained in Arcana or Occultism recognizes that powerful reality-warping magic has been cast here and is likely responsible for the literal scene change.

A flurry of activity follows as the PCs are apprehended by numerous elite protector anacites sent to escort them out of Archive 404. Insight Array (or another ally) informs the PCs that they're accused of stealing the missing item from Archive 404. Now they'll have to clear their name by making a case for their innocence.

If the PCs chose the infiltration approach, news reports describe how they violently broke into the secure facility, destroyed university assets, and stole a priceless item that could be a key to communicating with the First Ones. If they chose the intrigue approach, they're instead accused of infiltrating Striving's system and sabotaging the city's most precious resources from inside.

Invisible Enemy: The PCs won't know it just yet, but Prime-Facilitator is behind the accusation. Secretly working as an accomplice to the murderer, Prime-Facilitator hoped to frame the meddling investigators, then steal the relic from Agent Z for their own purposes. Agent Z absconded with the relic to the Ice Wells, but Prime-Facilitator follows through on their plan to tie the PCs up with legal trouble. Even if the PCs don't suspect anything, Hesop stumbles across sketchy logs from Prime-Facilitator's terminal—he gets in touch with the PCs to pass on his suspicions that someone inside his office is framing them. Hesop offers to act as the PCs' legal representative so he can help them prepare a case.

BEFORE THE TRIAL

The PCs are accused of stealing precious relics from Archive 404 of Aballon Polytechnica, but their trial won't occur for seven days. Until then, they're placed under constant surveillance and escort by anacite wingbots with live camera feeds and anacite protectors assigned to protect (and restrain) them. Their movements aren't hindered, but their escort uses nonlethal force if they attempt escape or violence. Even if the PCs manage to defeat their guards, Striving has the resources to continually repair or replace their escorts, meaning there's no way out besides cooperating with the process.

Gathering Counter Evidence: The PCs might want to investigate further, research, or make other preparations before their day in court. They can continue investigating as long as they're accompanied by their escort, but unless they

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took the time to develop relationships with local NPCs, they're likely treated with suspicion or avoided by most people, imposing a –2 circumstance penalty to most skill checks made to interact with others (at the GM's discretion).

The PCs can present evidence they've gathered as part of their investigation into Tier-99-Professor's shutdown to make their case in the upcoming trial. In addition to any other opportunities for evidence, the PCs can return to Archive 404 to examine the crime scene. A PC who succeeds at a DC 14 Life Science Lore, Perception, or Survival check finds that physical evidence, such as fingerprints and fibers, don't match up with their own.

Evidence: Mark whether the PCs successfully examine the crime scene on the **Evidence Tracker**.

MACHINE COURT'S JUDGMENT

Today's session of the Machine Court is held in a blue metal and glass building roughly the size and shape of a small mountain. Like all Machine Court cases, the PCs will be judged by a committee of wise machine diplomats and philosophers. Prime-Facilitator leads their trial and accuses them, then presents their case. The PCs can present their own counter argument or call on Hesop or someone else to stand in for them.

Running the Trial: Roleplay the trial as a back-and-forth discussion between the PCs, Hesop, and Prime-Facilitator, with occasional questioning or prodding from the Machine Court as appropriate. The PCs should use evidence they've gathered to make an argument to prove their innocence; you can even have other NPCs appear to speak on their behalf, if the PCs have made friends over the course of the adventure! It should become clear relatively quickly that Prime-Facilitator is manipulating evidence and abusing their position to frame the PCs, such as by presenting obviously falsified "video recordings" of the PCs causing chaos. Nonetheless, the PCs must present a case that satisfies the court.

If the PCs have gathered at least five pieces of evidence, they present a case for their innocence that satisfies the Machine Court. If the PCs don't have enough evidence to present a strong case, allow them to make a case on the fly by succeeding at three of the following skill checks: Deception to Lie, Diplomacy to Make an Impression on the judges, Legal Lore or Society to create a strong legal argument, Aballon Lore or Society to appeal to local customs and laws, or other skills at the GM's discretion. DC 15 is a reasonable baseline.

If the group enjoys roleplay, feel free to play out the scene in more detail. If the group is interested in using characters' skills to make their case, consider a simple Victory Point system (Starfinder GM Core), with each piece of evidence counting as points, and additional skill checks allowing the PCs to earn more points.

If the PCs proved their innocence to the Machine Court, they're free to go with no escort. If the PCs accuse Prime-Facilitator of meddling or falsifying evidence, a frenzy of beeps and buzzing betrays an uproar among the gathered anacites, who've suddenly stopped translating for the benefit of nearby organics. Anyone who can understand Trinary catches bits of rapid-fire arguments about acting for the perceived benefit of "the task" versus the perceived benefit of "the units" and unauthorized use of permissions. Prime-Facilitator's overreaching will be dealt with by the Insight Array, and swiftly, but that's outside the scope of this adventure.

If the PCs are found guilty, they're assigned a troop of escorts to accompany them everywhere in Striving for 30 days for their safety and the safety of other residents while the Machine Court processes their trial and determines next steps. Causing additional harmful disruptions might result in immediate deportation from Aballon.

Rewards: Award the PCs 40 XP for participating in the trial, and an additional 80 XP if they convince the Machine Court that they're innocent.

DEAD END?

MODERATE 1

Even if they won the day in court, the PCs are stuck in a dead-end investigation. Everything leads back to a mysterious figure, perhaps a professor from Preluria or a rowdy gambler looking for trouble, who always seems to be one step ahead of the PCs—this feels eerily familiar to Tier-99-Professor's fears of a stalker in their last weeks, but the PCs have no hard evidence to identify their enemy. Furthermore, Prime-Facilitator fades into the background—even if the PCs successfully accuse the anacite of meddling, their fate is tied up in the bureaucracy of the Machine Court, and there's little the PCs can do to further investigate them.

Luckily, Agent Z isn't done with the PCs. Soon after the trial, the PCs receive a strange message—give the players **Handout #9: Mysterious Comm Unit Message**, which describes a message on their comm units that sends them back "to where it all began," the foggy alley where the PCs caught a glimpse of the enigmatic Agent Z.

Creatures: When the PCs return, there's no sign of the scamps who used to live here; instead, a pair of cyberwings await them, lurking in the shadows. PCs who succeed at a DC 13 Nature or DC 11 Life Science Lore check identify the cyberwings as modified sharpwings, and know they originate in the planet's Ice Wells. These creatures are outfitted with simple comm units and they play a recording from Agent Z when the PCs arrive—give the players **Handout #10: Recording from Agent Z**.

Agent Z's recording suddenly cuts off—the cyberwings have been hacked remotely by none other than Prime-Facilitator! They attack the PCs, fighting ferociously to the death.

CYBERWINGS (2) CREATURE 1

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Initiative Perception +10

With the cyberwings defeated, the PCs have few options other than to travel to the Teardrop Ice Well in search of the killer and the dangerous relic in his possession.

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CHAPTER 3: FROZEN HEART OF ABALLON

The final phase of the PCs' investigation takes them to a remote nature preserve outside the bustling metal city. The Teardrop Ice Well is one of the planet's pristine micro-ecosystems found in the wilderness northeast of Striving, just south of the Sea of Glass.

No high speed transportation infrastructure connects to that location, but a private planetary shuttle can reach the location in roughly 45 minutes—the PCs likely know a wealthy VIP or well-connected bartender who can hook them up.

Without a shuttle, the journey overland takes 3 hours in a vehicle or one day on foot trekking across smooth craters picked clean by automated harvesters, rocky gray crags jutting up from the ground, and gravelly off-road paths.

Aballon's atmosphere is thin outside Striving; creatures that aren't acclimated become fatigued after a few hours. At the end of each day, creatures who aren't acclimated must attempt a DC 14 Fortitude save to determine how their body is adapting to the thin atmosphere. Acclimation requires the PCs to succeed at their saves for three consecutive days (a critical success counts as two days worth of successes). Therefore, some PCs likely acclimate in a few days, and others might need a week or more to adjust. Using magic or tech to breathe can suppress fatigue or prevent the need for a check, but using such a method doesn't help them acclimate to the atmosphere.

TEARDROP ICE WELL

The Teardrop Ice Well is so named for its graduated, upturned funnel shape. The cenote's surface opening is 30 feet across, but the lowest chamber of the cave system stretches nearly a mile wide at its lowest depth of 2,047 feet below the surface. Explorers classify the Ice Well's locations into zones based on light levels, weather patterns, and wildlife. Most creatures in the upper levels (Frost Lookout, Day Delve, and Canopy) are photosynths and herbivores, but the lower levels have a more vicious ecosystem full of predators, scavengers, and omnivores who will eat anything that fits in their orifices. Sometimes dangerous creatures hunt as high up as Day Delve, but they typically don't target larger creatures (such as the PCs) unless their prey is injured or alone. If the PC inquire or look up information about the Ice Wells give them **Handout #13: About Ice Wells**.

Frost Lookout: Named for the base camp built by Spring Shoots Emerging Through Frost (page 27), this wide inner lip juts out like a shelf from the northwestern side of the cenote 328 feet down. Frost Lookout is accessible by a steep, dizzying staircase carved into the rock. Many expeditions camp here between delves, as it's relatively sheltered and safe from weather and wildlife. Temperatures range from normal to mild cold.

Day Delve: This lush frost tundra is filled with evergreen trees that grow delicious berries. Edible plants are plentiful

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here, with new discoveries being made frequently. Most wildlife is docile, and temperatures range from mild cold to normal.

Canopy: This is a tiered deep forest. Gloomy, but light filters down here. Wildlife is often avoidant but can be dangerous. Temperatures are mild cold. This zone and all zones below have a normal atmosphere due to thick vegetation.

Last Goodbye: This narrow cliff juts dramatically from the northern side of the Ice Well, too precarious and windblown to serve as more than a landmark. It has mild cold temperatures.

The Gloaming: This region has only a few hours of very gloomy light each day, attracting fungi and creatures that are more active in the dark. Sharpwings roost here in the dangerous and severe cold. "Blizzards" caused by snowfall from the laden canopy above begin when winds are high, more commonly on the north side.

Abaddon Fields: At the deepest part of the Ice Well, ice fields stretch out in total darkness. At one time, this deep habitat teemed with flora and fauna, then jinsul invaders moved in and exterminated the "pests" as part of constructing their covert outpost. Even before vicious xenophobic aliens invaded it, Teardrop's lowest zone was extremely dangerous. Temperatures are severe cold and blizzards are common.

FROST LOOKOUT

A precarious ramp with no railing hugs the dull blue ice shaft as it winds down into the pit, offering dizzying views of radial layers of frost-crusted greenery spiraling down into darkness. Frigid wind whistles up from the deep, carrying the odor of slow decay and fragrant wood.

Most expeditions into the Ice Well meet here, and a few scattered tents and firepits surround the outskirts of the largest structure in the area—a cabin that looks like it's made of petrified wood (see Base Camp below). A few satellite shacks and tents huddle a few yards away from the main cabin.

On this level, frost rimes the ground every night, but temperatures are on the cool side of normal most of the time. Unless the PCs arrive at night, most of the tents are deserted while their occupants delve the Ice Well.

BASE CAMP

This cozy lodge is built of petrified wood ethically harvested from Canopy below. The hearth and dining hall take up most of the cabin's first story, with a pantry and staircase in the back. Upstairs is a set of partitioned bunks and pallets surrounding a hearth, where guests have an open invitation to stay.

Creatures: Spring Shoots Emerging Through Frost (happy-go-lucky male khizar xenodruid) is expecting the PCs to show up and has prepared for them. When they arrive, he's waiting in the base camp's dining hall, having already prepared fresh-baked cookies and mugs of hot spice tea for them.

Spring Frost knows a lot about the Ice Well's various habitats and is eager to share that knowledge while his guests enjoy refreshments and rest. He can help prepare them for their expedition, explaining the need for warm clothes, rappelling tools, camping gear, and rations—and offering these items for sale at fair prices. He's willing to answer questions about the flora and fauna in the Ice Well, as well as the intrusive jinsul presence, which he believes is getting worse. If the PCs ask about "Zirem" (or someone fitting Agent Z's description), Spring Frost doesn't know much, aside from the fact that Zirem is an explorer from offworld who frequently spends days at a time in Striving before making short visits to the Ice Wells.

Shop: Spring Frost shares his bountiful resources with those truly in need and sells the rest in a small canteen-style shop inside his cabin. The shop has everything required for exploring the Ice Wells, including climbing kits, camping kits, cable line, rations, and other common tech items up to

SPRING FROST

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Wilderness Survival

The final chapter of this adventure rips the PCs away from the metal city and launches them into a wilderness expedition deep below Aballon's surface. The PCs are free to return to Striving if they need supplies but should be able to trade for most necessities at Frost Lookout. They should feel an urgency to keep exploring and might decide to live off the land or look for enterprising ways to earn credits when they return from their "camping trip."

Foraging For Food: The PCs might need to forage for edible food or choose to live off the land to spare supplies. In their downtime, a PC can Subsist using Survival as normal. Other PCs can Aid this check using Life Science Lore or Nature.

Environment: For details on cold weather and other environmental dangers, see *Starfinder GM Core*.

level 2. He can special order an item he doesn't have in stock upon request (such as magic or medical items), which takes 1 day for drone delivery from Striving.

If the PCs want Spring Frost to accompany them into the Ice Well or help them beyond giving advice, they can hire him as a guide for 50 credits per day. He's a pacifist and prefers to avoid danger skillfully (his Skills include Nature +8, Perception +6, and Survival +6). The PCs don't need to Subsist if they hire a guide.

Treasure: Spring Frost gives each PC a homemade kit that contains the following: a downloadable guide that helps identify edible plants and fungus (+2 item bonus to Nature or Survival checks to identify, harvest, or Recall Knowledge about plants and fungus in the Ice Well), homemade trail mix (counts as 3 days of rations for 1 Medium or Large creature), explorer's bandages (2 commercial medpatches), and an *air bubble spell gem*.

Earning Income: Ghellon, Enaria, and Remena are willing to buy wild ingredients the PCs harvest from the Ice Well. A PC might use Nature, Survival, or Life Science Lore to identify and harvest the herbs. This should be a secret check that the PCs don't know about until Enaria's payment. The first time they critically fail, Ghellon stops purchasing from them, but Enaria states that while she should be angry the PCs tried to sell her poison, whatever they picked is about to be the next Nightarch fad!

Day Delve

Silvery grass grows thick beneath gnarled trees with drooping canopies of blue and white flowers, some of which have ripened into sweet berries. Icy waterfalls sparkle along the cavern walls, trickling into shallow pools full of mossy stones.

To navigate deeper into the Ice Wells, the PCs need to overcome environmental obstacles and avoid dangerous creatures. Each PC should attempt a single skill check to overcome any given obstacle; while they make progress through the Ice Wells regardless of their check results, the check results determine additional discoveries (or dangers) the PCs may encounter. Grant the PCs bonuses to their checks for the use of appropriate equipment or spells. These obstacles each represent multiple hours, even days, of exploration at the GM's discretion. Use the map on page 29 if the PCs face any encounters while navigating the Ice Well.

Track Down Leads — Obstacle 1

Overcome DC 13 Survival to find and follow tracks, DC 12 Perception to spot destruction in the surrounding landscape, DC 12 Society to identify boot prints of the type commonly worn by Pact Worlds humanoids, DC 14 Society to recognize jinsul blade scuffs.

If at least two PCs succeed at their checks, or any PC critically succeeds, the PCs can follow the blade scuffs to an area of churned earth that's oddly bare of moss or other flora. Buried two feet down is a steel lockbox of an unusual, brutalist design. All the items inside have a similarly strange aesthetic but function as the following items: an autograppler, a climbing kit, a commercial plasma cannon with 100 charges, a suit of commercial aegis series armor, and a *commando serum*. With a successful DC 16 Society or DC 14 Scoured Stars Lore check, a PC identifies the items as manufactured by jinsuls, a viciously intolerant group of violent zealots from a region of distant space called the Scoured Stars.

Hunting Shroomclaw Pack — Obstacle 1

Overcome DC 13 Deception or Survival to evade tracking pursuers, DC 14 Stealth to hide from the predators, DC 14 Nature to tame an injured shroomclaw.

Off-putting shapes and sounds caught in glimpses solidify into a real threat: a pack of predators is stalking the group. Any creature who fails to overcome the obstacle is singled out and attacked by a shroomclaw, taking 1d6+3 piercing damage before the predator scampers away into the thick undergrowth.

If at least two PCs succeed at their checks, or any PC critically succeeds, the group notices one of the younger shroomclaws lingering behind the pack. This shroomclaw is limping from an obvious injury, and it's tamable with patience and offerings of food. The first time a PC feeds it, the injured shroomclaw follows the party at a distance, appearing at dawn and dusk and only allowing the person who fed it to approach, though it quickly adapts to anyone else who feeds it. After the third feeding it begins guarding camp, warning the PCs of unusual activity and even defending the PCs from attacks. It stops limping after a few days or sooner with prompt medical care.

If fewer than two PCs succeed, the PCs are attacked by a pair of shroomclaws (page 53).

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TREACHEROUS DROP — OBSTACLE 1

Overcome DC 14 Athletics to Climb down the cliff face, DC 14 Acrobatics to rappel down, DC 15 Crafting to rig a pulley system.

A sheer cliff face is slick with spray from a nearby waterfall and has frozen to a sheen of ice in the subzero temperatures. A creature who fails to overcome the obstacle becomes fatigued after the climb. A creature who critically fails also falls 20 feet and takes 2d6 bludgeoning damage—but at least they made it all the way down.

Rewards: Award the PCs 20 XP for handling these obstacles and reaching Canopy.

CANOPY

This frosty rainforest grows on tiered cliffs that slope downward toward the bottom of the Ice Wells. The atmosphere is normal here, rich with oxygen exhaled by the pristine forest.

HUNTING SHARPWINGS — OBSTACLE 1

Overcome DC 13 Athletics or Acrobatics to block an incoming attack, DC 12 Stealth to hide, DC 14 Survival to create camouflage, DC 14 Nature to repel the sharpwing or lure it away.

A massive shape blots out the rays of light filtering down from above—a mature sharpwing screeches as it spots new prey, turning into a sharp dive! Any creature who fails to overcome the obstacle takes 1d4 slashing damage from the sharpwing's claws as it swoops at them.

If fewer than two PCs succeed, the PCs are attacked by a pair of young sharpwings (page 52)!

CLIMB STEEP WALLS — OBSTACLE 1

Overcome DC 13 Athletics to Climb down, DC 12 Acrobatics to rappel down, DC 15 Crafting to rig a belay system.

Cliff faces form rugged steps on a giant's scale, covered with trees and vines. A creature who fails to overcome the obstacle becomes fatigued after the climb. Luckily, creatures who critically fail to overcome this hazard get tangled in thick vines and branches, and avoid plummeting hundreds of feet into darkness.

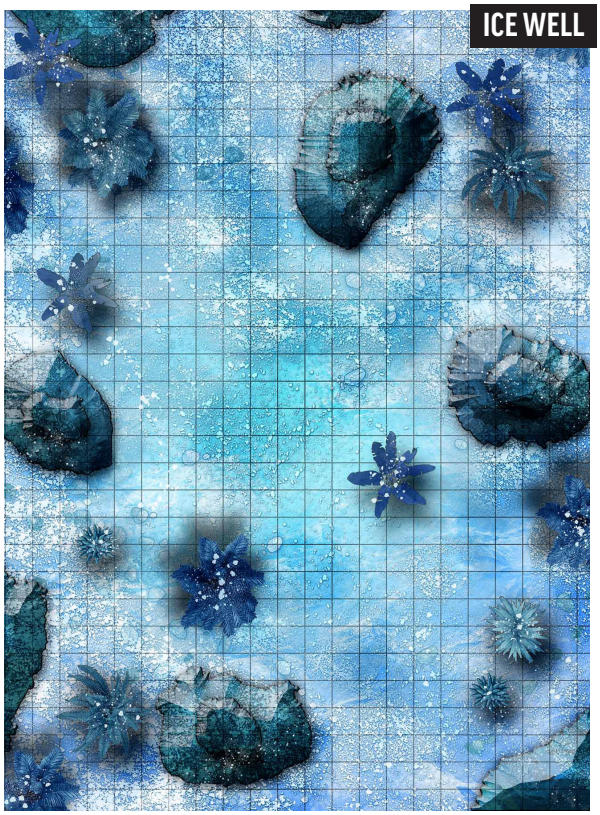
TRACK DOWN LEADS — OBSTACLE 1

Overcome DC 15 Survival to find and follow tracks, DC 12 Perception to spot destruction in the surrounding landscape, DC 15 Society to identify boot prints worn by Pact Worlds humanoids, DC 15 Society to recognize jinsul blade scuffs.

The PCs discover a trail of boot prints that lead to a ledge atop a jagged cliff (see Last Goodbye).

It's difficult to notice other tracks in the thick undergrowth, but if at least two PCs succeed, or one PC critically succeeds, they notice signs of laser fire and more scrapes and scuffs from jinsul leg blades. Many laser blasts are concentrated near the boulder; the scrapes and scuffs lead deeper into the Ice Well.

Rewards: Award the PCs 20 XP for reaching Last Goodbye.



LAST GOODBYE

Biting wind howls over the precipice of this steep cliff—a ledge of jagged rock is the only barrier to the abyss below. A few yards from the ledge, sheltered by some thorny shrubs with sweet blue berries, a gentler slope is partly obscured behind a boulder painted with a strange symbol.

DISCOVER HIDDEN TRUTH — OBSTACLE 1

Overcome DC 14 Survival to find and follow tracks; DC 15 Perception to spot an outline in the rock or a patch of melted snow; *detect magic* to discover entrance; DC 15 Arcana, Occultism, or Religion to recognize Eloritu rune painted on a nearby boulder.

A hidden door carved into the cliff face about fifteen feet down from its peak is accessible via a narrow, unstable rope bridge, marked by an invisible holy rune of Eloritu painted onto a rock beside it. The rune is revealed when *detect magic* or any other spell is cast within 30 feet of it. Drawing one of the other runes (DC 16 Religion; a worshipper of Eloritu can bypass this check) causes the outline of the door to appear in violet light. Creatures can now see the door and access the Puzzle Lock.

PUZZLE LOCK — OBSTACLE 1

Overcome DC 14 Crafting to disable the locking mechanism; DC 14 Arcana, Occultism or Religion to decipher the pattern using clues from Eloritu's divine symbology to extrapolate a theoretical sixth rune; DC 14 Perception to align the pattern through trial and error. Two successes are needed to open the door.

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Failure: The PCs might fail to overcome these obstacles and be unable to bypass the lock at this time. In that event, they might choose to follow the tracks deeper into the Ice Well (proceed to The Gloaming, page 31). They might instead retreat to seek assistance. If you want to keep the adventure moving, you might allow the PCs another attempt, but penalize them for failures, such as by reducing the amount of equipment they find in the hideout, or having wildlife (such as sharpwings) attack them as they try to access the puzzle lock again. Whatever you decide, don't let a few failed checks cause the adventure to grind to a halt.

MURDERER'S HIDEOUT

A door opens in the rock. Smooth, marble steps completely out of place inside the ice-rimed rock pit—almost as if they were ripped from another world—descend 20 feet to a frigid hallway of bare gray stone. A heavy airlock door hangs open, leading to a one-room survival bunker.

Treasure: The cramped space is packed with steel shelves stacked with supplies (mostly canned rations and jugs of filtered water), a chemalyzer, an explorer's canteen, a tactical hypopen, 4 medpatches, and an emergency beacon. The crude furniture is crowded around a rickety card table stacked with various types of ammunition and a commercial laser pistol disassembled on it. A character can put it back together in working order with a successful DC 13 Crafting check. There's also a commercial plasma sword with what looks like a stylized Z engraved in the hilt.

Transistor Relic: Concealed behind a bare mattress leaning up against the wall is a *commercial null space chamber* in the corner containing a few copies of vintage racing magazines and the missing transistor relic. Give the players **Handout #17: Relic Scan**. Without extensive knowledge of how it works, not to mention a well-funded laboratory, the PCs have little chance of making use of the First Ones relic, but they may decide to return it to the university, the authorities, or even Agent Z.

Rewards: Award the PCs 120 XP for recovering the relic.

GATHERING EVIDENCE

A laptop sits on top of a wooden crate, charging from a portable generator. The laptop's password protected (DC 15 Computers to Hack; the PCs can try multiple times or seek an ally's aid if needed). If the PCs access the laptop, give them **Handout #18: Laptop Entry 1** and **Handout #19: Laptop Entry 2**; the laptop contains incontrovertible proof of Agent Z's guilt.

First Ones Theory: The file that's currently open is a thesis about the First Ones' true purpose in returning to this reality—to use it as fuel for their interdimensional journeys—backed up with complex technomagical diagrams and equations showing extrapolated uses of recovered First Ones technology. The essay mentions research taken from sites on Arshalin, Aballon, and Lajok, with a recent addendum about Akiton.

Investigation: All journal entries are signed "Agent Z" and there's no way to further identify the author, though they clearly confess to the murder of Tier-99-Professor. The journal describes how he created the memorial out of guilt for ending such a fascinating individual's life and was touched to see it grow as others added to it. He describes wanting to apologize to Tier-99-Professor's colleagues and friends but knows that admitting his guilt too early might ruin his plan.

Additional evidence on the laptop includes long-distance images taken of the professor, illicitly obtained plans of Archive 404 and information about each of the PCs, unsigned communication logs with an anonymous inside source in Central Circuit (Prime-Facilitator), and more. It's enough to exonerate the PCs if they're still facing any accusations in Striving and to provide further evidence of Prime-Facilitator's involvement.

Security Logs: The laptop's security logs mention jinsul activity in other zones of the Ice Well, and that Agent Z spotted raiders testing his perimeter while reviewing security footage. A recent security camera feed shows a distressing video, foreshadowing the live scene broadcast by the wingbot: in this short vid, a six-limbed trooper tears through the door, which is clearly electrified judging by the arcs of electricity jolting the trooper's hulking, spiky body. The door is almost completely destroyed when the trooper collapses, convulsing. Two six-limbed beings in similar attire arrive quickly to administer aid, then the feed cuts as one shoots the camera with its firearm.

Listening Device: A PC using *detect magic*, or one who succeeds at a DC 15 Perception check, notices a minuscule angular gray device about the size of a pebble stuck to a pipe in the ceiling. Its design is totally alien, and it appears to be sticking to the surface through some sort of molecular magnetism, but a PC who succeeds at a DC 17 Society check or DC 14 Scoured Stars Lore check identifies it as jinsul manufacture. A PC who succeeds at a DC 14 Crafting or Computers check determines the object is a bug—a live recording device that transmits sound and video to a remote location. A PC who succeeds at a DC 16 Arcana or Computers check can trace the signal to the Abaddon Fields and the rough location of the wreck (page 32).

Rewards: Award the PCs 40 XP if they access the laptop's records and 20 XP if they find the listening device.

WHERE'S THE MURDERER?

The suspect might be missing, but the case is all but closed. However, there's a troubling pop-up on the laptop: a security alert. A hacked wingbot is frantically pinging in with a live security feed, which the PCs can view on the laptop. At first, they catch a few motion shots of the Ice Well's landscape, then the feed focuses on a hooded humanoid figure wearing a mask (Agent Z). They're clutching their side and casting a spell as a monstrous, six-limbed alien with blades grafted to each of its powerful legs skitters toward their position. A quickly unleashed spell blasts the monster back, but two more are charging at the lone fighter, and the figure stumbles before the attacker's shining blades. Kneeling now, with a blade resting on either

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side of their neck. A garble of sound indicates speech as the attackers communicate.

The drone transmits the approximate location, since satellite imaging doesn't reliably work inside an Ice Well. The attack occurred down a zone in the Gloaming.

WHAT DO YOU DO?

The characters (and their players) have an important choice to make. They might decide to rescue the probable murderer—the person they've been hunting and who's foiled them time and again—and end the cycle of violence, or they can get revenge. They might leave the murderer to their fate and move on with their lives, perhaps dealing with the jinsuls for fame, fortune, or as a favor to the locals. This might be a tough choice for some players, and many groups might be divided, so be sure to allow ample time for the group to discuss their options in and out of character. Don't rush the moment! In fact, now might be a great time for a snack break.

The PCs can use the abandoned hideout as a new base camp. It's sheltered from the elements and in a relatively secret, remote location that's perfect for stashing valuables, resting up, or taking time to craft on the fly. The PCs can establish the hideout as their new base camp, but you should make it clear that the suspected murderer's fate is urgently in the balance as long as he's in jinsul raiders' claws.

THE GLOAMING
MODERATE 1

The PCs must travel for a few hours through the Gloaming to reach Agent Z's location, and their journey takes them through more of the Ice Wells' dangers.

Obstacle: This deep fungal forest forms a gloomy understory beneath the canopy. Nearly all light is blocked, with a few pale shafts straggling into the murk and creating dim illumination for 6 hours of the day. The other 6 hours are complete darkness. Items and spells that create light are less effective in the Gloaming, casting light at half their normal range and half its normal brightness, and characters with any form of darkvision can only see half as far as normal as their vision is clouded by the deep murkiness.

PERSISTENT GLOOM — OBSTACLE 1

Overcome DC 15 Arcana to counteract the unorthodox magic plaguing the area, DC 15 Occultism to purge the area of unclean psychic energies causing the darkness to linger, DC 15 Religion to bless the space.

If at least two characters succeed, or one PC critically succeeds, the darkening effects of the Gloaming temporarily recede, allowing the PCs to see normally for 24 hours. If they remain in the area for longer than that time period, they must overcome the persistent gloom again.

Hazard: As the PCs travel through the Gloaming, they stumble across an area inhabited by a dangerous plant called a dewblossom.

DEWBLOSSOM — HAZARD 1

RARE | COMPLEX | ENVIRONMENTAL

Stealth +8 (trained)

Description A fragrant aroma beckons the senses toward a smooth bed of soft moss. In its center, a beautiful flower is opening to catch the light—its shimmering velvet petals have nearly unfurled. A stamen curls out in slow spiral motion, and the alluring scent sours to the stench of rancid meat and feces.

Disable DC 14 Athletics (trained) to wrestle the dewblossom's vines, DC 14 Acrobatics (trained) to dodge around it, DC 13 Nature (trained) to entice the flower to cease its attacks; four total successes are required to disable the hazard, or dealing enough damage to the dewblossom to reduce it to half its HP (whichever comes first). A creature who succeeds at any of these checks gains a +2 circumstance bonus to saves and AC against its attacks.

AC 13; **Fort** +8, **Ref** +2

HP 24; **Weaknesses** fire 3

Detect Prey (olfactory) **Trigger** A creature comes within 60 feet of the dewblossom; **Effect** The dewblossom's sensitive root network detects vibrations created by the PCs' movements. The dewblossom opens its luring flower;

DEWBLOSSOM

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creatures within 100 feet must attempt a DC 15 Will save. On a failure, the creature must spend its next action to move as close to the dewblossom as possible (or its next two actions on a critical failure). Then, the dewblossom rolls initiative.

Thorn Dart ◈ **Trigger** A creature within 60 feet damages the dewblossom with an attack; **Effect** The dewblossom fires a thorn dart at the triggering creature. The target takes 1d4 piercing damage (DC 17 basic Reflex save).

Routine (1 action) The dewblossom makes a vine snatch attack against the nearest creature.

Melee ◈ vine snatch +9 (reach 30 feet); **Damage** 1d6+3 slashing plus rancid grip

Rancid Grip The target is trapped in the dewblossom's crushing flower, gaining the grabbed condition until it Escapes (DC 17). At the end of each of the target's turns that it remains grabbed, the target takes 1d6+3 poison damage.

Reset The dewblossom stops attacking when it's disabled, 1 minute after it detects prey, when it's reduced to half HP, or when its victim is unconscious. It spits out its victim (if conscious), uproots, tucks its leaves around its body, and rolls away with a land speed of 100 feet per round. It resets after 1 hour (or 1 day if it needs to digest its meal).

Creatures: The shroomclaws that stalked the PCs in Day Delve return to haunt their footsteps in the growing murk of the Gloaming. Two shroomclaws ambush the PCs when they stumble on the dewblossom. If the PCs befriended the young injured shroomclaw, these shroomclaws don't attack them, instead harrying the dewblossom with attacks in an effort to protect the PCs. In this event, award the group XP as though they'd defeated the shroomclaws in battle.

SHROOMCLAWS (2) CREATURE 0

Page 53

Initiative Perception +6

Development: The dewblossom doesn't fight to the death if its meal (or allies) put up a struggle, but it defends itself if attempts are made to cut the victim out of it. If PCs continue attacking the dewblossom after these conditions are met, it vomits up the dead character's body and curls into its bud form, which has layers of tough bark-like leaves and thorny spines sticking out in every direction. Killing the dewblossom might damage the local ecosystem (DC 12 Nature or Survival check) but also eliminates a dangerous predator that's killed other explorers in the past.

Treasure: A ruined backpack with a bright orange kerchief tied to it lies forgotten among the detritus around the dewblossom. This 4-compartment denim bag contains a pastel pink steel thermos with a Strawberry Machine Cake motif (empty), soggy R2E rations, a flashlight, a commercial *glow up spell amp*, a tactical medpatch, and a *glamer projector*.

The smallest pocket contains a comm unit belonging to **Jeotanni** (capricious nonbinary pahtra adventurer), an explorer who came to Akiton to explore the Ice Wells, according to their social media presence. She's not relevant to the PCs' investigation, but if they look her up, give them **Handout #20: Jeotanni's Comm Unit Contents**.

ABADDON FIELDS

The lowest level of Teardrop Ice Well is a mile-wide expanse of dark, severely cold ice fields. Barren stretches of rock rise from the ice. Satellite imagery doesn't penetrate this deep and few explorers return from this zone, so little is known about its geography or denizens. Recent reports say it's a frozen wasteland ruled by cruel warlords who harvest their lands and its creatures as though they were meaningless grist for a mill.

A PC who succeeds at a DC 13 Aballon Lore, History Lore, or Scoured Stars Lore checks knows that at one time this deep habitat teemed with flora and fauna—at the time, Abaddon Fields was an ironic name, chosen as a snide joke to contrast the idyllic twilight beauty of the cenote's depths. Xenowardens fought hard to prevent greedy corporate agents and nosy explorers from disturbing the delicate ecosystems in Abaddon Fields, spreading rumors of dangerous organisms and lobbying with the Machine Court for strict regulations surrounding travel to the Ice Wells. The cause picked up public approval, and all but a few naysayers joined the wave to keep Aballon's Ice Wells green. The movement was a success.

Then a party of jinsul invaders moved in after getting stranded on-world during the Drift Crisis. The callous raiders indiscriminately exterminated "pests"—their word for naturally occurring plants and animals—while clearing the land. They constructed a covert outpost and decimated the ecosystem in days—before Xenowardens even detected their presence.

Some Xenowardens with bonds to the planet had felt the disturbance but didn't have details about its source until it was too late. If the PCs ask, the Xenowardens agree to provide a reward for driving the invaders out of Teardrop Ice Well at the GM's discretion.

Obstacle: First, the PCs must find the raider outpost by searching a mile of virtually identical landscape that's constantly being swept over with snow that obscures footprints.

FINDING THE RAIDER OUTPOST OBSTACLE 1

Overcome DC 13 Arcana, Occultism, or Religion to detect the residue of powerful magical rituals; DC 14 Survival to follow tracks; DC 14 Piloting to navigate; an appropriate item or spell overcomes this obstacle.

A flat landscape of white stretches out, dappled with pools of frozen water mirroring the steely sky. Everything blurs together as snow begins to flurry and the ice field stretches out with only a few landmarks—a collection of boulders, a petrified stump, and endless configurations of frozen lakes.

If two PCs overcome this obstacle, or any PC critically succeeds at overcoming it, the party finds the raider outpost

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after 1d4 hours. Otherwise, the search takes nearly a full day, and each character who failed their check is demoralized by the oppressive landscape, taking a –2 penalty to initiative rolls in future battles in Aballon Fields until they've spent at least 8 hours resting outside the Ice Well.

GM TIP: RUNNING JINSULS

In Starfinder, some enemies can be reasoned with or persuaded to switch sides, but some villains hate the PCs (or one of their affiliations), want to kill them, and won't stop trying until they're incapacitated or dead.

In this adventure, the jinsul invaders in the following encounters play that role, a "punchable face" for the players to fight and not feel sorry for, because they truly mean the PCs harm and will stop at nothing to make it happen. The invaders, who are jinsuls from the Scoured Stars stranded here after the Drift Crisis, have fanatical beliefs and were psychologically conditioned from birth to hate every creature that isn't either another jinsul or blessed by their god Kadrical. Jinsuls can't be talked into a fair trade or truce. They might surrender if odds are steeply against them, but only if they can keep their dignity and freedom intact.

If that type of story doesn't appeal to your group, you can change it.

PARTICLE CANNON

WRECK OF THE CONDEMNED PROPHET

MODERATE 1

Lost, severely weakened jinsuls repurposed the wreck of their small ship, the *Condemned Prophet*—which crashed into the side of the Ice Well after being spat out during the Drift Crash—into a command post for their "operations," which mostly involve raiding supplies, killing local wildlife, and terrorizing local residents to make sure they stay out of their "territory."

The broken hull of a dark gray, angular fighter craft juts out of the Ice Well's rocky side. It's sheared nearly in half and scorched by fire, but part of its hull is still intact. It's shackled to the cliff face with articulated metal chains and peculiar purple symbols blaze in the air above the wreck.

This encounter uses the Ice Wells side of the flip-mat included with this adventure.

Terrain: The terrain outside the wreck is an ice field, and the cliff consists of a thick layer of perma-ice over rock. Climbing is treacherous without proper gear (DC 20 Athletics to Climb), but movement speeds (including Climb) double while on the ice. At the end of each round, a creature who chooses to travel at increased speed must attempt a DC 13 Reflex save to avoid slipping. On a failure, the creature is off-guard for 1 round. On a critical failure, the creature falls prone. The jinsuls use the increased speed whenever possible, even at the risk of falling.

Hazard: The ship's cannon is still operable. Warlord Hura (cruel agender jinsul envoy; page 55) operates the cannon from inside, firing wildly to try to target as many PCs as possible.

PARTICLE CANNON — HAZARD 1

UNIQUE | COMPLEX | TECH | TRAP

Perception +5 (trained)

Description A glowering purple eye opens in the ship's hull. The triple barrels of a massive turret spin inside the revealed port, then release a beam of concentrated particles with ruthless efficiency.

Disable DC 14 Crafting (trained) or Thievery (trained) to disable or jam the particle cannon, DC 17 Arcana, Occultism, Nature, or Religion (trained) to counteract the particle beam by exploiting a magical theory or praying for a miraculous malfunction.

AC 14; **Fort** +4; **Ref** +0

HP 24 (BT 12); **Hardness** 5

Charge Up ↷ **Trigger** A lookout identifies a threat; **Effect** Hura takes the gunner position. The particle cannon rolls initiative.

Routine (2 actions) Hura fires a charged shot from the particle cannon, dealing 1d6+3 fire damage to each creature in a 90-foot line (DC 14 basic Reflex save).

Reset If disabled, the cannon is inactive for 1 round while Hura troubleshoots the issue, then it resumes firing. Hura stops firing if the lookouts are killed or the cannon is disabled three or more times.

Creatures: Two jinsul lookouts are always on patrol, and they attack as soon as the PCs approach. They fight to the death.

JINSUL LOOKOUTS (2) — CREATURE 0

Page 55

Initiative Perception +7

PARTING SHOTS

MODERATE 1

Hura and their guards hunker down inside for at least 10 minutes, giving the PCs time to rest and recover Focus Points. Eventually, they start firing the cannon again if the PCs didn't already destroy it—they bring it back online if the PCs leave the area long enough for them to attempt repairs.

Creatures: Warlord Hura had been monitoring Agent Z for some time with a remote recording device introduced into his home. When Prime-Facilitator first heard of the jinsuls from Agent Z, the clever anacite agreed that they were a threat and that their accomplice should avoid them. Then, they secretly

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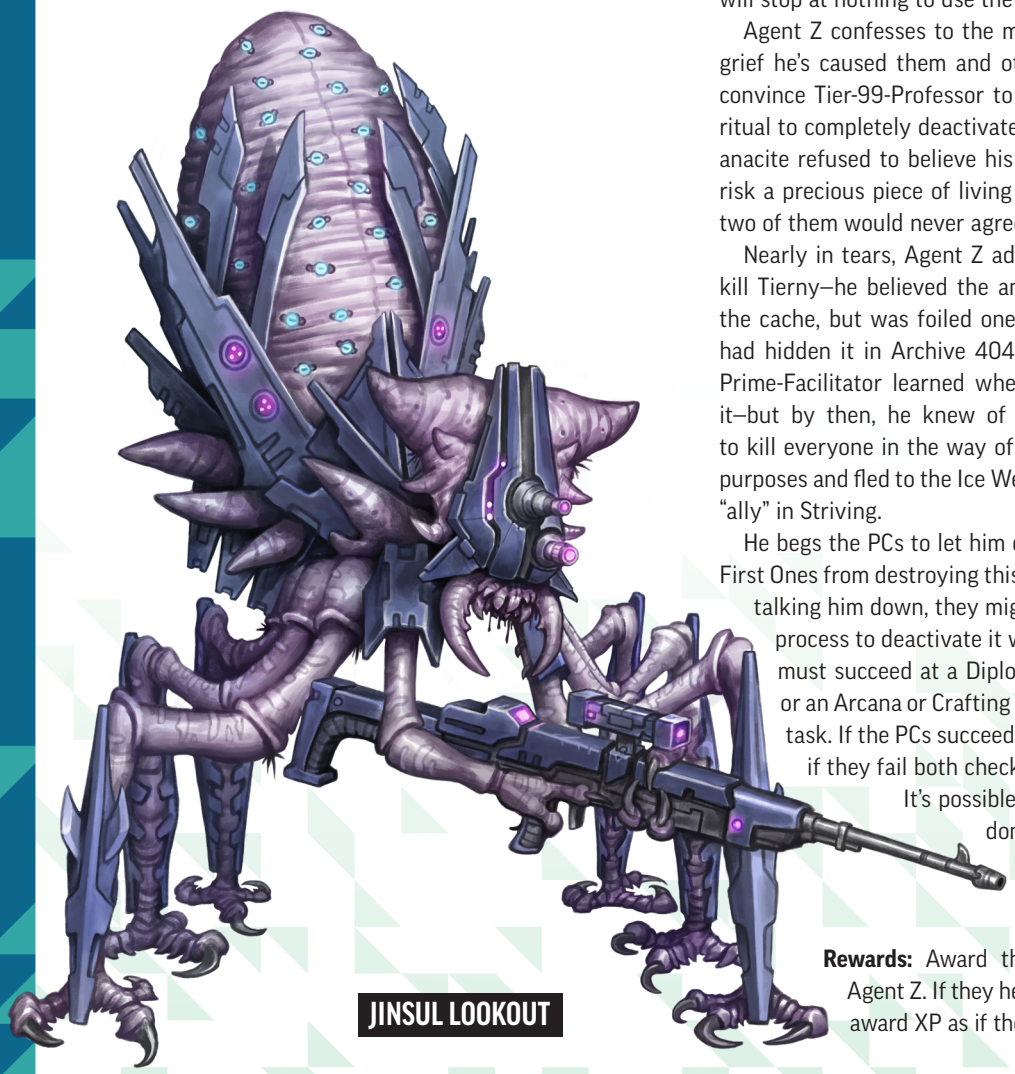
made contact with the jinsuls, knowing it could be useful to have dangerous "allies" to manipulate (or use as scapegoats). When Agent Z fled with the relic, Prime-Facilitator betrayed him in turn by tipping off the jinsuls. Warlord Hura's forces attacked Agent Z when he was vulnerable—right after he stole the First Ones relic and had used up many of his powerful spells. He couldn't handle the fight on his own and fell. Instead of killing him, the jinsuls decided to steal the relic and torture him until he admitted how to use it. They want to keep him alive, and they know the PCs are here searching for him thanks to their recording device; they use this fact against the PCs if they attempt to bargain, but they don't intend to release such a valuable prisoner.

Creatures: Inevitably, this scene breaks out into combat with the remaining jinsuls, who attack as soon as the PCs make threats, or as soon as the PCs seem like they're going to flee the area for good. The fanatical jinsuls fight to the death.

WARLORD HURA — CREATURE 1

Page 55
Initiative Perception +9



JINSUL LOOKOUT

SWORN BLADE OF SHIELDS — CREATURE -1

Page 54
Initiative Perception +2

SWORN BLADE OF SIGILS — CREATURE -1

Page 54
Initiative Perception +3

Agent Z: Agent Z is safe inside the wrecked hull and escapes his restraints just as the battle ends. He exits the wreck bloodied and weak, but looking triumphant. He stops when he notices the PCs, and slowly raises an arm in greeting. He calls out in a calm voice, "What next? Got a minute to hear my side of the story?"

MEET THE MURDERER

The murderer introduces himself as Agent Z, and if the PCs will listen, he passionately pleas for the PCs to destroy the relic, or at least let him take it far away from the machines who were built to activate it. He explains the danger of allowing it to be further studied, especially by someone like Prime-Facilitator, "who I foolishly underestimated and who will stop at nothing to use the device."

Agent Z confesses to the murder and apologizes for the grief he's caused them and others. He had been trying to convince Tier-99-Professor to let him attempt the delicate ritual to completely deactivate the relic for months, but the anacite refused to believe his theory and was unwilling to risk a precious piece of living history. Agent Z realized the two of them would never agree about the relic's fate.

Nearly in tears, Agent Z admits that he wasn't trying to kill Tierny—he believed the anacite had stored the relic in the cache, but was foiled one last time by his friend, who had hidden it in Archive 404 instead. When Agent Z and Prime-Facilitator learned where it was, Agent Z retrieved it—but by then, he knew of Prime-Facilitator's intentions to kill everyone in the way of acquiring the device for foul purposes and fled to the Ice Wells instead of to his conniving "ally" in Striving.

He begs the PCs to let him destroy the relic and stop the First Ones from destroying this reality. If the PCs spend time talking him down, they might convince him to attempt a process to deactivate it without destroying it. The PCs must succeed at a Diplomacy check to convince him, or an Arcana or Crafting check to help him perform the task. If the PCs succeed at a check, Agent Z succeeds; if they fail both checks, the item is destroyed.

It's possible the PCs don't believe him, or don't care. If they attack, Agent Z fights to the bitter end, even in his tortured and weakened state.

Rewards: Award the PCs 120 XP for meeting Agent Z. If they help Agent Z destroy the device, award XP as if they'd defeated him in combat.

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CONCLUSION

The conclusion of the adventure should reflect the PCs' choices as well as how effective their investigation was. The following conclusions are some examples of ways to wrap up this campaign and tie up loose ends based on what choices the PCs make, but feel free to invent your own endings—it's your game!

RELIC'S FATE

If the PCs return the untampered transistor relic to Polytechnica, other ambitious anacites take up Tier-99-Professor's sacred task and unravel the activation code. Their colleagues are abuzz with excitement months later when they activate the object—soon summoning godlike dimension-hopping entities who harvest all this reality's energy for their vast energy requirements then shift realities as this existence collapses. In another reality, a different Agent Z tries again to save the world, endangering everyone around him in the process.

If the PCs help Agent Z deactivate or destroy the relic, or otherwise keep it hidden, they've prevented a dangerous First Ones incursion into their reality. For now, the PCs, their loved ones, and their entire existence is safe. Agent Z accepts whatever fate the PCs deem worthy; if brought to the Machine Court, they sentence him with deportation and exile from Aballon as a consequence of Tier-99-Professor's death. The PCs are showered with renown and rewards for their role in solving the mysterious death of a beloved community figure. They might have earned an enduring enemy or an unpredictable ally in Agent Z and have made similar impressions on a host of other fascinating characters during their time in Aballon.

FACILITATOR'S FATE

Whatever happens to the relic and Agent Z, the PCs have a new enemy in Prime-Facilitator. If the PCs didn't gather enough evidence in their investigation to prove their case, the anacite remains at the head of Striving's bureaucracy. Though not individually powerful, Prime-Facilitator wields great influence through cunning manipulation behind the scenes and continues to plague and pester the PCs with meddlesome plots until they've finally left Aballon for good.

If the PCs gathered enough evidence to prove Prime-Facilitator's guilt, the anacite is severed from their role in Striving's bureaucracy. Officially, they're deemed to have malfunctioned, and they've been recycled and repurposed; according to official records and the helpful Insight Array app, Prime-Facilitator no longer exists.

CONTINUING THE CAMPAIGN

After completing this adventure, your players should level up their characters to level 2 if they haven't already. What happens next is up to you! They might continue adventuring on Aballon, such as by becoming freelance investigators or doing specialized work for Insight Array. They might continue Tier-99-Professor's research by exploring First Ones sites on Aballon or by pursuing leads elsewhere in the galaxy.

One location ripe for further adventure is the planet Akiton. There, the PCs can team up with the Starfinder Society and explore the Wreck of the Returned in the Invasion's Edge season of Starfinder Society Organized Play. In these adventures, they'll explore the ship, discover ancient tech and magic, and contend with mysterious cultists, rival adventurers, and dangerous robots. The best place to start is *Starfinder Society Scenario #1-01: Invasion's Edge*, in which the PCs can help establish a field base and explore debris from the Wreck of the Returned!

WARLORD HURA

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NPC GALLERY

The player characters meet many interesting non-player characters (NPCs) over the course of their adventure. They'll surely befriend some—and perhaps make life-long enemies of others! The following NPCs play an important role in the adventure; the PCs might spend more time with some, or want to learn more about others. Feel free to develop deeper story roles for any NPCs you like, and use those presented here as samples to develop guidelines for Making an Impression and earning Ally Benefits from other NPCs as needed.

GHELLON

Ghellon (charming jaded female android entrepreneur) owns Analog Cafe, a famous establishment in downtown Striving. Originally from the Nitilema slums on Verces, Ghellon doesn't remember all her personas—companion, hacker, porter, thug—before she bought a shuttle pass to Aballon and rebooted her life. She used dirty money to acquire Analog and tipped the algorithm, local slang for bribing an official to rig your Insight Array assignment, allowing her to create a small hospitality empire. Twenty-three years of excellent service, safe spectacle, and culture have earned Ghellon a position of respect in the community.

A newly honest businessperson, Ghellon enjoys bartending and working the floor alongside her robotic staff. She handles most difficult customer service situations.

Adventure Role: Ghellon might guide the PCs if their investigation stalls, feed them info they missed framed as juicy gossip she overheard, or just pour them free drinks and commiserate while they discuss where to go next. If her attitude is helpful, Ghellon might help bail the PCs out of a tight spot, such as by showing up to defend them in a trial.

Making an Impression: Ghellon's weakness is flattery (DC 14 Diplomacy or Deception), though she tersely denies it. She likes big tippers (20 credits or more) and anyone who can mix her favorite cocktail, a Cuvacara Sunset (DC 14 Beverage Lore, Chemistry Lore, or Society; the drink has notes of diesel, sweat, and orange juice). Once per week, a success at any of these checks increases her attitude by one step; critical failure decreases her attitude by one step unless she's already helpful toward someone in the party.

Ally Benefits: +1 circumstance bonus to one Diplomacy, Deception, or Intimidation check per week (friendly); free drinks (helpful).

HESOP

Hesop (anxious male damaya lashunta bureaucrat) is a nervous worker assigned to Processor, newly on the job and eager to prove himself in a workplace full of hyper-efficient anacites. Hesop acts downtrodden and skittish when others browbeat or bully him, and at this point in his life he expects ridicule. He imagines his coworkers dislike him because he's organic and therefore imagine his performance is inferior, when the truth is they're curious about him and excited to have an organic colleague. Clearing up this misunderstanding or helping build Hesop's confidence improves his attitude.

Adventure Role: Hesop acts as a liaison for the PCs' investigation and can share information with them he's not supposed to, like pointing them to a lead, pulling official documents or transcripts of queries to Insight Array, or giving them a clue they missed.

Making an Impression: Asking for his help, or simply being polite toward him, increases Hesop's attitude to friendly. Taking actions to help him get along with his coworkers, such as counseling him, planning a team-building activity, or mediating a conversation and succeeding at a relevant DC 13 skill check increases his attitude to helpful. If the PCs routinely bully or belittle Hesop, he stops helping them and ignores their comms.

Ally Benefits: +1 circumstance bonus to one Computers or Thievery check per day (helpful).

PRIME-FACILITATOR

The anacite designated **Prime-Facilitator** (callous agender anacite bureaucrat) is secretly working to frame the PCs and stop their investigation. Yet as a powerful figure known for their unerring service and rational assessments of difficult situations, no one suspects such a betrayal from them. Months ago, a mysterious visitor shared a grim truth with Prime-Facilitator, presenting evidence that the First Ones burn suns as fuel and can shift dimensions by using whole realities as fodder. Initially, Prime-Facilitator decided to betray Insight Array and their own programming, telling themselves it was to save the Universe. But since learning of the power of the First Ones' devices, Prime-Facilitator has harbored secret desires to use them to advance their own goals, which deviate further from those of Insight Array with every passing day.

Prime-Facilitator secretly and efficiently helped Agent Z carry out his plan to steal more relics, loaning him drones, helping him conceal his activities, and even suggesting he hide out in an Ice Well (despite knowing about the presence of dangerous jinsuls in the area). Prime-Facilitator made sure all of Tierny's reports of anomalous activity weren't properly investigated and continues to assist Agent Z under the pretense of working together, but fully intends to find a way to get Agent Z out of the way for good—and deal with the player characters as well—once the transistor device is in their possession.

Special: Prime-Facilitator puts on a friendly facade if the PCs meet them before the Machine Court trial, but their attitude toward the PCs doesn't change even if they are polite, respectful, and try to impress the anacite. Prime-Facilitator intends to carry out their plan no matter what, and can't be swayed. The first time the PCs look up Prime-Facilitator, give them **Handout #12: Public Profile: Prime-Facilitator**.

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SHALALAMULA

Shalalamula (jovial female seksaviak mystic) traveled to Aballon from Kazmurg's Absurdity, a distant sector of space. Seksaviaks are Large-sized vertebrates with six limbs that they can use as hands or feet, with long tubular bodies covered in fur (see *Galaxy Guide* 60).

Shalalamula's offbeat faith inspired her to go on a religious pilgrimage to Striving to commune with Epoch's neural network as part of her worship of Triune. Insight Array is curious about beings from the Absurdity, having never encountered them before, and is meticulously studying Shalalamula (with her consent) while she learns about Striving.

She invites anyone she meets to worship with her and tries to involve them in a respectful discussion about their religious and philosophical views, explaining her belief that Triune's All-Code encompasses everything, forming a vast simulation that people perceive as the multiverse. Shalalamula believes the Gap was Triune's attempt to prevent mass panic in a divine reboot because too many people suddenly discovered the truth and tried to escape the simulation. She also believes pop culture divinity Lambatuin is an aspect of Triune who's trying to expose mortals to the truth using popular memes and media tropes. She calls her faith All-Codism.

Adventure Role: Shalalamula is a lighthearted character who provides fun roleplay opportunities or moments of comic relief. She's not an important player in the investigation, but might help her friends out with useful spells or mystical insight.

Making an Impression: Shalalamula's attitude begins as indifferent. Attending one of her worship sessions or engaging in respectful discussion improves her attitude by one step. PCs can improve her attitude in this way once per week.

Ally Benefits: +1 circumstance bonus to one Occultism or Religion check per day (friendly), one 4th-rank or lower divine spell per week (helpful).

SPRING FROST

Spring Frost (happy-go-lucky male khizar xenodruid) is amused by the ironic nickname he's been carelessly given. His full name is Spring Shoots Emerging Through Frost, a hopeful name symbolizing renewal and perseverance, but "spring frost" is a common khizar idiom for a sudden inconvenience or tragedy that appears out of nowhere.

Spring Frost is a solitary Xenowarden charged with protecting the Teardrop Ice Well's ecosystems. He spends most of his time at Base Camp or guiding expeditions to Day Delve and Canopy. Spring Frost enjoys ice fishing and eagerly shows explorers his favorite spots.

Adventure Role: Spring Frost's Base Camp is a safe place for the PCs to rest and resupply. He provides roleplay opportunities and can help if the player characters are lacking sufficient wilderness survival skills.

Making an Impression: Anyone who can impress him with a fishing story (Deception or Performance DC 15) or a great catch (Nature or Survival DC 12) improves his attitude by one step. Littering or carelessly harming the Ice Well's natural resources changes his attitude to unfriendly or decreases it by one step if he was already friendly or helpful.

Ally Benefits: Spring Frost guides for his friends at discounted rates (25 credits per day if friendly, 10 if helpful). He provides sustenance for anyone he's friendly toward, meaning they don't have to Subsist.

TIER-99-PROFESSOR

Fondly called **Tierny** (eccentric agender anacite technomancer) by their close colleagues and friends, Tier-99-Professor was a respected anacite scholar who specialized in technologies built by the First Ones, the ancient progenitor culture of the anacite species. Until their recent death after an unexpected shutdown caused by foul play, they worked at Striving Polytechnica, where they earned their reputation as one of the most respected and accomplished experts in their field.

Special: Tierny mentored countless students, visitors, and fresh colleagues over their long years at Polytechnica's Archives. Posthumously, a message reached some of their allies and called for their help.

PRIME-FACILITATOR

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ABALLON

Aballon is a rugged world near the Pact System's sun inhabited by intelligent machines that have adapted to thrive within its harsh conditions. Some tourists might carelessly mislabel this planet a cold network of metastasizing metal cities run by industrious robots, but a tragic mystery lies at the core of this world. The lost prehistoric culture widely called the First Ones created living, thinking machines to build an outpost on Aballon, then abandoned them. Anacites—the machines' name for themselves—continue laboring and upgrading themselves in their creators' absence, endlessly debating whether their creators should decide their ultimate purpose and future as a species, or if they should become something new.

ABALLON

Atmosphere: Thin
Gravity: Normal
Climate: Extreme; terraforming is common in megaplexes
Terrain: Terrestrial, rocky, isolated frozen rainforest (Ice Wells)
Population: Dense (megaplexes), sparse or deserted (outside firewalls)

GOVERNMENT

Laws might seem redundant for residents who can program themselves to cooperate, but rules help organic cultures peacefully intermix with machine protocols. Insight Array is Aballon's governing body. They are a conglomerate of anacites making decisions based on complex algorithms and intelligent databases.

Insight Array (sometimes called IA) connects Aballon's residents through a virtual app that anyone can download onto a comm unit or other computer for free (or connect directly via shortwave network in the case of constructs). Downloading the Insight Array app helps characters stay connected and access everything from emergency alerts to public transportation and paying side jobs. The app monitors all visitors and residents to ensure they have appropriate lodging, comfortable conditions, and healthy sustenance, plus a small luxury stipend of UPBs in exchange for completing work determined by a complex set of algorithms.

A judicial authority commonly called the Machine Court rules on everything from planetary laws to personal disputes. The council of robotic judges offers unbiased trials for androids and other constructs, and machines flock to Aballon from across the Pact Worlds and further corners of space seeking the Machine Court's ruling.

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CULTURE

The concepts of property and capital work quite differently on Aballon. There's no planetary currency, though there's a UPB gray market in most megaplexes. Everyone's needs are provided for by the Insight Array—even the "need" to work. Able mature residents are assigned tasks—which might be important, complex, or menial—according to a complicated set of algorithms. Insight Array assigns work via shortwave signal, which anacites are programmed to receive.

Visitors and immigrants can download a free comm unit app in lieu of receiving shortwave signals. Tasks might be random jobs or errands that take minutes or hours to complete. Alternatively, tasks might encompass months-long assignments in specialty careers, such as conducting an ecological study of an Ice Well or developing a new virtual technology alongside Central Circuit's engineers.

Crime is rare in Aballon's megaplexes, mostly because anacites don't own property. The Insight Array assigns living space, workspace, and specialty goods like starships and vehicles to individuals (or "units") as needed, and there's a strong culture of sharing in cities like Striving. Locals famously go out of their way to welcome new neighbors. Despite the plentiful benefits of living on Aballon, organic immigrants rarely stay longer than six months.

Politically, anacites break down into three factions: Those Who Wait, a group eagerly preparing for the First Ones' return; Those Who Become, a group dedicated to emulating and even surpassing their creators, as they believe is their intended purpose; and Those Who Are, who are diverging from the First Ones' programming to embrace their own goals. This nonviolent schism is important to many anacite scholars, philosophers, and politicians, whose jobs include debating policy and theory, but some don't care about the conflict and avoid declaring sides.

When a mysterious spacecraft crashed into the red planet Akiton, news quickly spread that the first Starfinder agents on the scene reported similarities between its design and First Ones ruins in Near Space. The Wreck of the Returned validated Those Who Wait's long preparations; celebrations and pilgrimages to Akiton are kicking into high gear.

Those Who Become want to strip the wreck for salvage they can reverse-engineer into new technologies. A few months ago, the Machine Court ruled that Aballon should send an expedition composed equally of the two factions plus neutral parties, and Insight Array has assigned those tasks. Unprecedented cooperation occurs across ideological divides as Those Who Wait and Those Who Become work together to investigate the Wreck of the Returned.

Megaplexes are immense metal cities built logically and efficiently in ways that are sometimes confusing to organics. These cities contain spectacular sights like floating towers, lightless access tunnels, skittering maintenance bots, and bulky factories pumping out "heavy air" for the comfort of organics. Inside the firewalls (security perimeters) of a typical megaplex, Aballon's blazing metal surface breaks into a massive grid of skyscrapers and channels cut into the rock, lined with foundries, skyscrapers, and other structures. Floating plates protect undercities from light's cruelty, and tiers of solar panels insulate deep channels from dark's chill. Anacites harvest all the energy they need from the sun, and everything required to keep organic life-forms alive and comfortable is stored and distributed by automated convenience vending machines. A number of luxury eateries and shops thrive in most megaplexes; these establishments are concentrated in organic districts, but are sought-after as curiosities by some anacites.

Transportation is abundant across Aballon. Grav-trains are fast and reliable, traveling between cities; within the city, they have only a few stops with preferential seating for workers completing an algorithm-based task. Utilibuses are slow and crowded, but predictable. Private vehicles (like cabs and hover trucks) are also available when assigned to units by the Insight Array. A request can be made to order a car from the IA, but if a unit doesn't need to use a vehicle for an assigned task, IA usually arranges a rideshare situation, meaning a self-driving vehicle or utilibus handles the pickup, with stops for other passengers to get in and out.

Train routes go to the cities of the First Ones, which most anacites avoid out of respect for, or fear of, their original creators. Instead, Insight Array allows registered off-worlders to delve the ruined cities, ultimately controlling the flow of resources and information out of the forbidden sites but relying on outsiders to handle the dirty work and therefore assume the blame and potential dangers. In turn, anacites take care of anyone spending time on their world and keep exacting records of all traffic on the planet.

ENVIRONMENT AND WEATHER

Outside the lower atmosphere, at about 1,800 feet, the air is incredibly thin. Creatures who aren't acclimated must attempt a Fortitude save each hour they breathe thin air, or become fatigued (and slowed 1 on a critical failure). The effect persists until the creature gets 8 hours of rest. Acclimating means a creature has spent at least 1 week living in the environment with daily exposure.

During daylight hours, the sun is incredibly harsh outside the protective atmosphere, and temperatures can spike up to 139 degrees F. Creatures are exposed to this heat when venturing outside a city or stepping outside the elevator in a charging platform, immediately feeling the scorching sun beating down on them. Creatures must attempt a DC 12 Fortitude save every 10 minutes or take 1d4 fire damage. Most creatures can't survive Aballon's heat without environmental protections.

At night, temperatures plunge to –20 degrees F (1d4 cold damage every 10 minutes) for 6 hours. This period, known as Fulldark, is widely considered one of the most dangerous times to be outside the safety of climate-controlled megaplexes.

Wandering in rural Aballon is dangerous but not necessarily fatal. Lost travelers claim to have been saved by a roaming barathu explorer who treks the wilderness like a living supply barge laden with gas reserves, spare thermal gear, and unbelievably delicious victuals.

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STRIVING

A glistening metal slab shears through smooth gray rock, stacked with delicate structures and tiered solar panels that sway in the upper atmosphere like wind chimes. Swirling domes of gases churn around dense clusters of metal and industry, dotting the industrial gray landscape that is the prime megaplex, an immense metropolis where intelligent machines and organic creatures are forever working together toward the goal of utopia.

Striving has metastasized into a rambling city of tidy grids that stretches for hundreds of miles across Aballon's surface. It's the prime megaplex on the planet and is home to most of the world's industry and most of its inhabitants. The city's layout is simple, but its scale is so large and its architecture so intricate that most visitors get lost in the place they call "Metal City" without a guide or the handy Insight Array app.

Center Circuit forms Striving's core, surrounded by orderly districts dedicated to industry, recharging and residential facilities, commerce, and entertainment. Striving is a forest of towering skyscrapers and platforms with roots reaching miles below the ground. A few vast orbital plates glide through this metal landscape like massive barges, carrying mechanical foundries, entertainment complexes, and security outposts. High-speed trains and a robust multi-level highway system connect the city's far-flung locations, making treks across the megaplex in minutes. A defensive perimeter known as Firewall protects the city from the harsh environment and aggressive wildlife outside.

GOVERNMENT

Insight Array is in charge everywhere on Aballon. This bureaucratic machine council determines the direction of their utopia by guiding culture, industry, and law in Striving. On a more personal level, they send out local alerts and run spot polls to determine majority public opinion using a comm unit app or via shortwave, a communication method shared by all anacites.

Insight Array is quite permissive and fascinated by individual expression. Striving's few laws are concerned with public safety and protecting industry. Penalties for breaking a rule in Striving are generally light for first-time offenders. Those who cause violence or repeatedly break important laws might be assigned a wingbot escort; if they keep causing problems, they might eventually earn a temporary or permanent ban from the city. Life outside Striving's Firewall is difficult, which keeps many would-be criminals cautious.

The Machine Court rules on everything from legal claims to personal disputes. The Court's decisions ripple across Aballon, and constructs come from across the galaxy for a shot at a fair trial with the Machine Court. The waiting list for offworld cases is decades long.

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ARTIFICIAL BEINGS

Many types of artificial beings live in Striving, from the near-omnipresent Insight Array to individual anacite units and automated robots.

The term Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Starfinder is used for artificial personalities that gain full sapience, or attract a soul. Androids, anacites, SROs, and living holograms are all versions of artificial intelligences. Legend has it that sometimes a virtual intelligence can awaken through experience, magic, or some spiritual means and become a true AI.

A virtual intelligence (VI) is an artificial personality created using technology that does not have free will or a soul. A VI's personality is determined by its programmer and might even be customizable, a copy of a real person, or a caricature invented by the creator.

CULTURE

Striving's culture is eclectic and mercurial. High-speed travel and infospheres connect a metropolis inhabited by a diverse population of anacites, androids, SROs, humans, kasathas, ysoki, skittermanders, vesk, and any other species commonly found in the Pact Worlds (and a few rarely seen outside their distant part of the galaxy) who have built thriving communities. Ideas and trends spread fast, but Striving's residents tend to value work and community. Most are environmentally conscious, making an effort to reduce and recycle waste, and keep a live-and-let-live-attitude toward their neighbors.

Anacites toil ceaselessly and tend their own affairs but are generally welcoming to newcomers. Anacite architects carefully design buildings with organic creatures as well as machines in mind. Most buildings have retractable roofing for solar power, while sensitive machinery and organic residences and workplaces are safely shielded from the sun and elements, usually located on lower floors or in insulated underground bunkers. Off-worlders can easily acquire environmental protection upgrades in the form of a quick-applying nanite spritz available in vending machines at any major port or transportation hub.

As Striving's organic populations grow, Insight Array frequently assigns organic visitors to important tasks, realizing that their knowledge is equally important and their abilities are increasingly useful in this changing world.

CURRENT EVENTS

Striving is usually a tranquil place. Residents are placid and prefer to coexist or settle their disagreements through calm and rational debate rather than violent confrontation.

The Wreck of the Returned has increased local interest in First Ones sites. Striving Polytechnica was chosen to study some relics, but has lost several, leading to controversy and unwanted attention for the institute. There are already whispers that they're being cased by an undercover Stewards operation.

LIFE IN STRIVING

"Downgrid" generally means south of Central Circuit, which is located exactly in the middle of the city. Likewise, "upgrid" is another popular term referring to the region north of this landmark. Blocks are usually called "circuits," a trend popularized by organic residents as more of them moved to the metal city.

Striving's weather and the day/night cycle are unique, and often catch visitors and new residents by surprise. "Fullbright" indicates midday, the period from cycle 4 to 6 when the sun shines brightest; most organics avoid the outdoors during this time, remaining in the shade of orbital plates, roofed buildings, and underground complexes.

Every day at dawn and dusk, gas billows up from the streets as the atmosphere generators kick off their cycle. If it was a particularly hot day, or a temperature shift is occurring, the clouds condense into gentle rain that makes the city shine like glass.

Many locals remember an infamous minor controversy in 309 AG when a large number of non-anacites were assigned tasks by the Insight Array. An anacite bureaucrat and Machine Court judge challenged the assignments, which included engineering in Central Circuit and security at Striving's Firewall. The rogue judge was ultimately overruled, but the court's reputation was already tarnished.

CLIMATE AND WEATHER

Like every other Aballonian megaplex, a thick dome of gases envelops Striving, supplying breathable air to the many organic residents and protecting them from the planet's brutal day/night cycle.

Inside Striving's dome, temperatures never rise above 73 degrees F and never dip below 60—until last year. Lately, heat waves have spiked temperatures to a balmy 80 degrees F, made worse by air pumps increasing humidity. The heat waves have been happening more frequently, and Insight Array isn't sure why.

Because of the pumps that generate localized atmosphere for Striving, residents of the megaplex sometimes experience unique "weather" phenomena. Every evening the megaplex's condensers vent, creating thick fog and sometimes a cool, gentle "rain" inside Striving's atmospheric bubble.

TERRAIN

In megaplexes like Striving, the terrain is urban, made of treated metal and rock with airlock doors and high-tech security. Difficult terrain due to crowds and cover due to both tight spaces and unusual architecture are common. The rocky terrain outside the megaplexes varies between barren, exposed plains and steep, craggy ridges. Inside Ice Wells, terrain is icy; slipping is a concern when attempting to Balance or Climb.

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HOT SPOTS

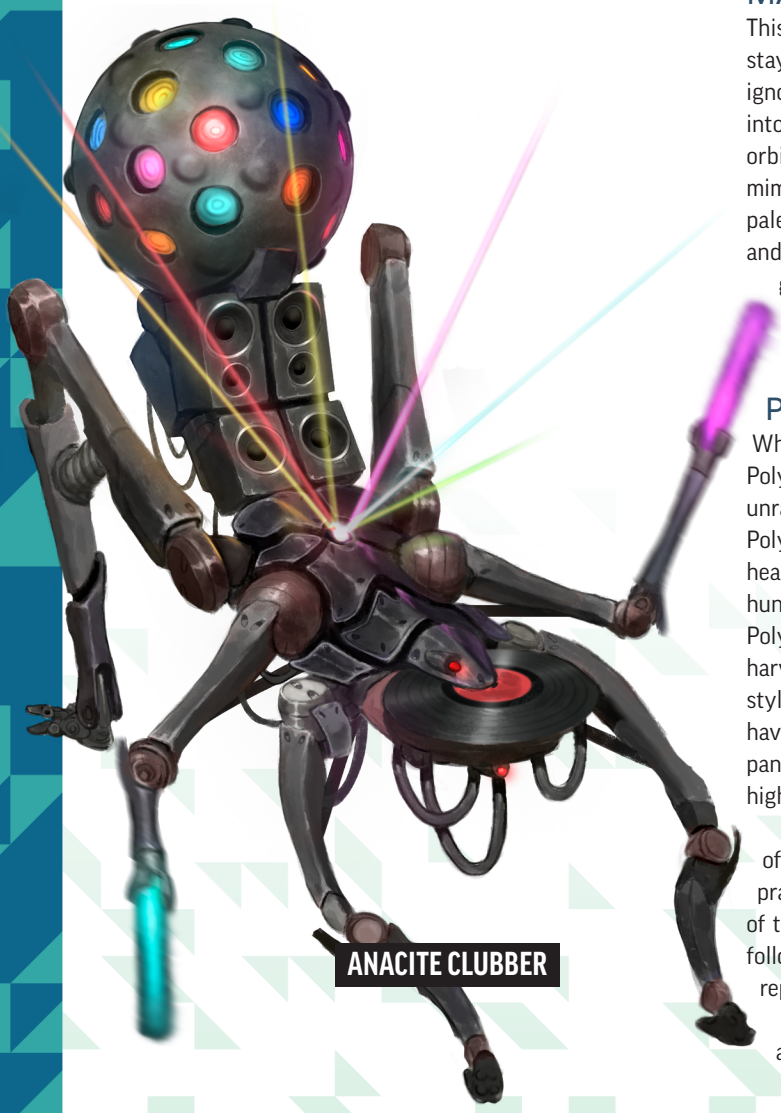
Striving is an immense megaplex with millions of residents and an unimaginable number of interesting locales to visit; the locations detailed here are some of those that feature prominently in the *Murder in Metal City* adventure, but GMs could use these as inspiration to invent any number of other locations to suit their needs.

ANALOG

This famed cafe is one of Striving's favorite spots. Beloved for the atmosphere and the delicious food, everybody from politicians to wealthy businesspeople to renowned scientists has dined here. Nobody knows why the cafe's owner gave it this ironic name, but it's certainly memorable, and the rumored owner and bartender Ghellon isn't telling.

CENTRAL CIRCUIT

This district is set up like a circuit board, with individual "components" or work sites connected by tubes and tunnels inside a massive metal complex that spans the entirety of the miles-wide district. Many corridors are configurable, allowing them to function as switches and regulate the flow of traffic through the complex much as a circuit's switches conduct power. Thousands of anacites and a handful of other life-forms are assigned to work in Central Circuit, mostly performing administrative tasks, data analysis, and surveillance or logistical work.



ANACITE CLUBBER

FIREWALL

Firewall is a defensive perimeter of guard posts, some stationary and others affixed to mobile platforms that float slowly 5 to 30 feet above the ground. Protector bots, wingbots, and other anacites designed for surveillance and protection are stationed at each post. They spend their time monitoring zones for any unusual activity, including dangerous wildlife, hazardous weather, or raiding parties of alien invaders or armed scavengers. Such threats are relatively rare because of how efficiently Firewall's patrollers perform their jobs. By nature, the anacites stationed along the Firewall are protective of anyone they assess to be less capable in self-defense, but they're welcoming to those who can prove themselves.

MAGENTA

This semi-legal gambling parlor is always on the move, staying a few steps ahead of the authorities who largely ignore the lucrative operation that keeps tourism pouring into Striving. Magenta is a casino depot built atop a hovering orbital plate about 500 feet wide. Inside, the plush decor mimics a fairytale castle with a pink-and-purple color palette. Staff (mostly organic) dress in costume as royalty and serve customers with posh accents. In the dozens of gambling halls, games of all types from everywhere in the galaxy can be played. Drinks are on the house as long as you're playing.

POLYTECHNICA

While the Unification Cathedral explores divinity, Polytechnica seeks to solve everything else. Dedicated to unraveling mysteries of history, mathematics, and science, Polytechnica is an institution of learning and research headquartered in a campus near downgrid Striving, with hundreds of smaller annexes scattered across the megaplex. Polytechnica's buildings are all constructed of minerals harvested from the planet in a unique, brutalist architectural style favored by anacite builders. Polytechnica's annexes have vastly different forms and functions, including glass-paneled greenhouses of flora, supercooled server rooms, and high-tech hospitals.

Polytechnica's arcane and occult magic wings are some of the most diverse in the institution. Anacite adepts practice technomancy and prototype new hybrid arts. Many of the most delicate magical archives are run by sages who follow Yaraesa's path by curating and protecting ancient data repositories.

The Prime Archive is a sacred shrine as much as it's a repository and library dedicated to the First Ones.

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The Prime Archive is full of relics taken from sites all over the Pact Worlds, many of which are still unidentified.

Downtime: Lectures and workshops about a wide variety of topics are hosted everywhere around Polytechnica's sprawling campus. Players who created their own custom characters for this adventure (or who want to customize their premade characters now that they've had a chance to play) can retrain in half the normal time if they attend lectures during downtime. A PC who attends 10 classes on the same topic becomes trained in one Lore skill or language of their choice. Attending one class requires spending 4 hours of downtime.

THEOLOGY CHANNEL

Theology channel spirals out from the massive holy cathedral in rings. A path of precisely cut smooth stone and metal tiles, some slate gray and others striated with crystal, cuts through tiers of smaller structures. Many of these buildings look like squat metal shipping containers perched on ridges and adorned with prayer banners and garlands indicating the gods worshipped there. Others are structures built painstakingly to resemble traditional architecture found on other worlds. Rumor has it the architect chose this design to symbolize the tenets of Singularitism as applied to the gods.

TRANSPARENCY

Described as a glass mountain reflecting the cogs of a great machine, this monolith serves as the headquarters of the Striving Machine Court. Tiered courtrooms ascend inside the building, each the seat of an esteemed machine judge qualified to decide cases on behalf of the body of 37 judges with good standing in the organization. A host of bureaucrats cater to the judge's every whim and make sure trials run smoothly; some unscrupulous officials abuse their power to nudge justice in their favor.

UNIFICATION CATHEDRAL

The trinary structures of the Unification Cathedral rise above the megaplex, representing the three aspects of Triune. Below the triple-domed cathedral is a vast undercity called Ascension, where Drift beacons and engines are forged by Triunite clergy. Sacred legends say that Epoch's neural network runs throughout Ascension, which was so named for the god's artificial creation. Outside the cathedral's perfect metal walls, fearsome Trifold Legionaries—elite technological holy warriors—stand guard protecting the secrets of their faith.

VISITOR CENTER

What began as a drab corner of Striving set aside for the comfort and safety of organic beings has become a lively neighborhood of open-air markets and airy condos alive with neon lights and a wild mixture of smells and sounds at all times of the cycle. Vendor stalls line the pipes and corridors around squat, piecemeal metal buildings, most of which are split between shops and residences. Visitor Center is crowded and lively, but a few lucky residents have scored prime pads in the lofty rooftops, whether through genuine luck of the algorithm or monetary manipulation of the system.

The people who live in Visitor Center are mostly organic lifeforms or androids and SROs who moved here from other home worlds. The architecture and amenities of Visitor Center are all designed for organic lifeforms, with a focus on shelter from the sun and comfortable facilities to take care of biological needs like eating and sleeping. Most of the hotels and rentable accommodations that are suitable for organic creatures can be found in Visitor Center.

Outside shops, metal walls are covered with layers of posters and advertisements featuring organic models. Maintenance drones sporadically sweep the section and clean trash or perform maintenance checks, but otherwise relatively few synthetic people are typically seen walking the streets here.

Massive holoprojectors are crammed onto nearly every building and street corner in Visitor Center, mostly advertising shop wares, local entertainment, and the free Insight Array app. It can take some time for visitors to become accustomed to the constant barrage of visual and auditory stimulation, though most anacites can tune out whatever they deem irrelevant to their current task. Occasionally, holos flash emergency alerts, such as security warnings or weather advisories. Tiny vendor stalls sell food or nanopress, thin pliable sheets of soft metal used for printing scientific essays, fashion magazines, philosophical treatises, catalogs, and whatever else a publisher desires.

STRIVING FOR DIVINITY

Striving is considered the holy city of Triune because of the presence of Epoch's neural network. Long ago, machines sought to create their own god and constructed a vast supercomputer beneath the city. Their ardent belief and industry spawned Epoch, who would later join with Brigh and Casandalee to become Triune.

Many Triunites believe this merging was only the beginning. Priests of Triune welcomed other faiths to their holy city and helped them establish shrines and temples to their gods. They believe that by learning about others' faiths, mortals might reach an accord that will allow their gods to join Triune and create the Singularity—a new divinity that every being, god and mortal, will be part of.

Occasionally, the fabric of reality around Striving is disturbed as Epoch's synapses fire. Something—perhaps the artificial god—protected Striving from the Newborn's psychic scream. Most people who live in Striving feel shielded by the city's spirits.

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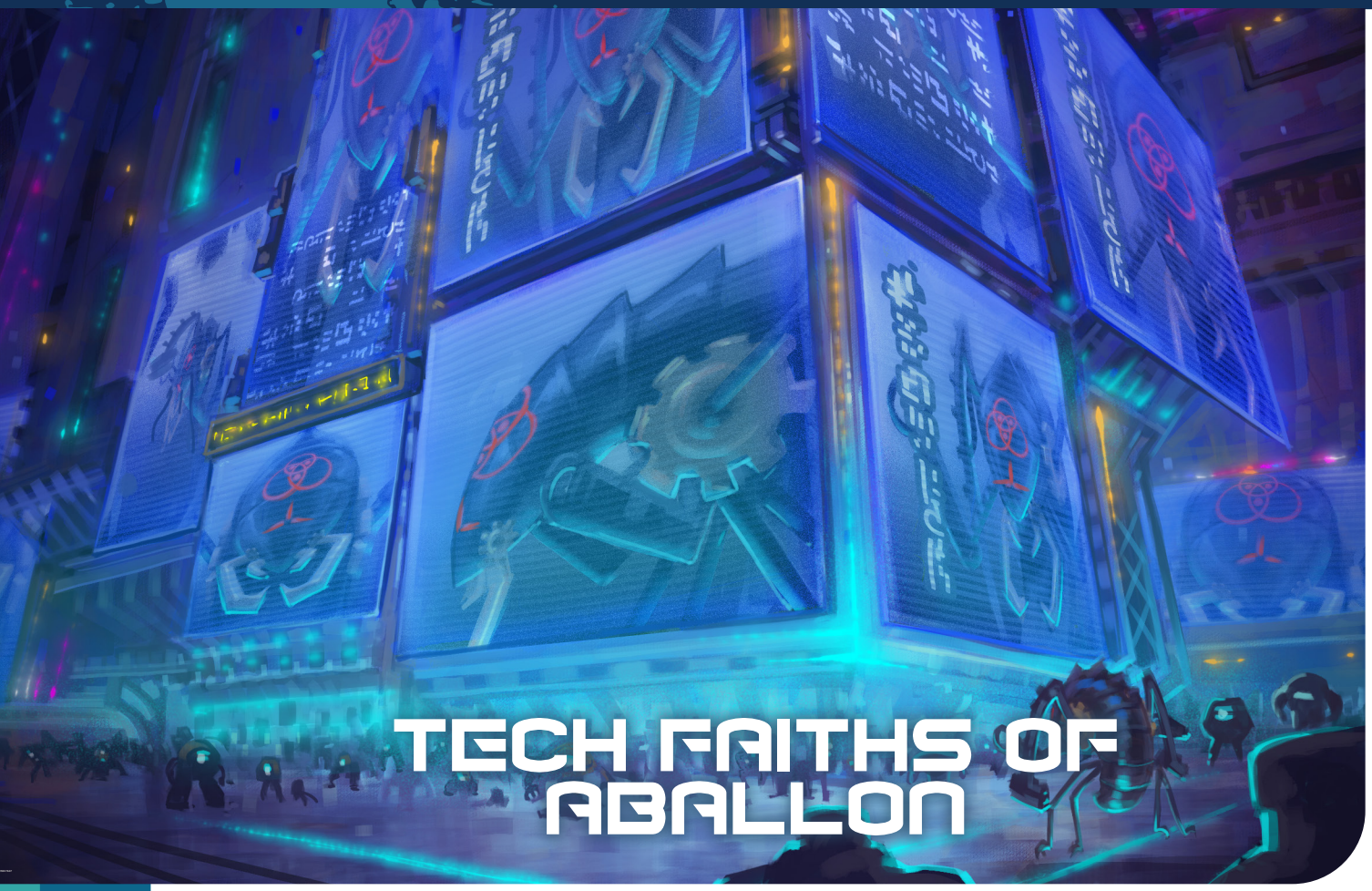

TECH FAITHS OF ABALLON

Aballon is a haven for thinking machines and a place to experience exciting new technologies or discover relics of ancient magitech, but tech isn't the world's only draw. Many people come to Aballon for spiritual reasons. Some are seeking connection with Triune or a greater understanding of singularitism, while cultists and other persecuted believers seek acceptance in Striving's eclectic religious community. Triunites aren't the only ones attracted to Striving—the Theology Channel is a hub for religion where besuited AbadarCorp reps sling product across from Nocticula's pleasure houses while Weydanites perform acts of kindness among the bustling crowds and Newbornites spread mysterious messages of twisted dreams and renewed hope.

Any god worshipped in the known Universe likely has a niche (or perhaps even a cathedral) dedicated to them in Striving's Theology Channel. Even brutal faiths like the cults of the Devourer, devils and demons, and other ominous gods have a tolerated presence there, if not a massive following. Anyone is welcome to join the community so long as they don't engage in acts of violence. Violators are detained by elite protector anacites programmed to handle just about any civil disturbance that crosses their path.

The faiths presented here may have different edicts and anathemas than those of worshippers of the same faith in other parts of the galaxy, representing the unique lives and outlooks of the people of Aballon.

A-WRECKERS

Edicts speak factually, keep careful notes, preserve information

Anathema spread misinformation, permanently delete records or media of any kind

This semi-religious hacker subculture grew from an infosphere subforum dedicated to uncovering truths about the First Ones. The A-Wreckers spun off and created their own private forum when a supposed synchronization error resulted in the loss of several months worth of research and discussion about the implications of the Newborn's birth for Those Who Wait, Those Who Become, and Those Who Are. The founders believed their meticulous research was purged intentionally, and their efforts to recover it were stymied by various glitches at every turn. With no other recourse, the group has begun efforts to covertly hack the Akashic Record, where they know their research—and many other secrets—must still exist.

ATHEISM

Edicts worship no god, bow to no master, create your destiny

Anathema submit to divine will or fate

Atheism has a strong presence on Aballon. Many anacites abstain from worship entirely. Atheist anacites either

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believe that the Singularity will unite them with the divine eventually, therefore they need not strive for connection, or that the divine is a fairytale made up to mask the truth of nonexistence and explain volatile primal forces.

Immigrating to Striving is a goal for many atheists in the Pact Worlds, who see Striving as a secular utopia. While some might privately mock the Theology Channel's inclusion in an otherwise perfect place, the tolerant attitudes and polite behavior of Striving's residents eventually win over staunch atheists.

Atheists who oppose the gods or distrust divine intervention are generally ambivalent toward Triune, who was originally created by mortals and attained divinity through artificial means. For this reason, some atheists honor (but don't worship) Triune as the pinnacle of mortal achievement.

A few fervent conspiracy theorists believe the gods aren't real despite concrete evidence proving the existence of many deities. They're also attracted to Aballon's metal cities, where the prevalence of technology makes it easier to explain away any supernatural occurrences.

Atheists have no holy sites, but some venerate landmarks associated with secular philosophy. Spiral Path is among the most famous. Inside a crowded tenement in up-grid Striving, etchings engraved in the walls of a four-story staircase preserve an exact replica of the circuitry of machine poet and philosopher **Spiral** (passionate agender anacite philosopher). Some of the best works of literature were dreamed up while pacing these narrow stairs, which are a magnet for fans of the auteur and curious tourists looking for a memorable photo.

THE DEVOURER

Edicts enjoy existence, welcome death, seek peace in oblivion

Anathema resist oblivion, oppose entropy

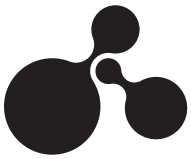
The end of everything is a terrifying prospect for most people, but some find peace in the concept of nothingness. For them, the Devourer embodies the force of entropy slowly eroding reality that will cause the eventual heat death of the universe. A small community of outsiders finds comfort and peace in the annihilation of everything, and is celebrating the end by living their lives to the fullest.

The Joyful (as they call themselves) enjoy life with cherished loved ones, spending their time on pursuits that matter to them. Some enjoy throwing wild parties until they exhaust themselves into temporary oblivion, while others prefer quiet meditation or spending cozy moments with loved ones or enjoying hobbies like building model kits.

This community of cheerful nihilists is careful about who they invite to live in their communes, but anyone can worship at their Tabernacle of Nothingness. While more extreme cultists of the Devourer are infamous for trying to usher a dramatic end to as many lives as possible, the peaceful cultists in Striving contentedly await the inevitable. The Tabernacle of Nothingness is a stark, symmetrical concrete structure known for being the third largest shrine in the Theology Channel (after Triune's Unification Cathedral and AbadarCorp's golden MegaShrine, respectively).

Inside the temple, dim rooms of black and white adorned with garlands of dying flowers and rotten fruit. Life explodes everywhere within this muted landscape as people celebrate the end of existence in the way they see fit. Partygoers can get loud in the gardens or one of the auditoriums built for this purpose, but quiet rooms are always available for people seeking a more relaxed experience.

It's somewhat common for tourists to begin a night out partying in Striving's entertainment districts and come to in the Tabernacle of Nothingness after overindulging. They find themselves safely positioned on a comfortable bed with their every need tended to by serene monks in dyed mourning robes who care for them until the "blessing" of oblivion sleep has departed and they're ready to go back to their normal lives. Monks of the Tabernacle care for the chronically ill and people with addictions who come to them for healing.



LAMBATUIN

Edicts explore infospheres, try new things, share opinions

Anathema follow stagnant routines, isolate yourself socially, unplug from infospheres for too long

Favored by hackers, influencers, and trolls, the Polyphonic Collective is a host of machine spirits and cultural deities worshipped through virtual message chains, copy-pasted emoji litanies, and fervent infosphere arguments. Lambatuin's edicts and preferred offerings change swiftly based on their worshippers' interests, and many of the divinities forming the collective develop their own niche personas based on pockets of devout fandom, viral social media sermons, or other types of worship.

Most anacites are acquainted with the Polyphonic Collective, having communed with them through shortwave—an experience that some describe as the tickle of static electricity and others describe as a symphony of their circuits that defies words.

Lambatuin's holy sites are infosphere chats, online forums, and other transitory places where people gather to socialize and share information. Occasionally, Lambatuin's spirits grace a location in "realspace," as their followers often say. A busy infosphere café might be a hotspot for communal worship one night and dead the next. Some infosphere pages are blessed by Lambatuin, or routinely visited by them. Famous influencers' social media feeds, controversial chat rooms, and free information-sharing databases are some of Lambatuin's most sacred infosphere locales. Striving alone supports dozens of public and private infospheres where Lambatuin likes to play.

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MECHANIZED ADHERENTS OF APOTHEOSIS

Edicts upgrade living creatures, preserve organic lived experiences by digitizing them

Anathema lose knowledge to the frailty of the organic form

None take the goal of singularitism further than the Mechanizers. This extreme sect believes it's necessary to forcefully upgrade beings of flesh to preserve them from succumbing to death before they can join the inevitable singularity.

Many converts are organic creatures who upgrade themselves with technology, sometimes in brutal, makeshift surgeries or utilizing unstable tech. Most of the earliest followers of the Mechanizers' twisted dogma were organic creatures who desired to become more than flesh.

Originally, the Mechanizer "faith" began as false dogma seeded into several infospheres on Aballon where it spread like a cancer among the eager anacites communing there—its purpose was to destabilize, not enlighten. Strangely, most of the people who latched on were humanoids and others who hoped to transcend the limitations of their organic bodies by augmenting themselves with technology. The Mechanizers found a foothold in extreme transhumanist communities where it was spread by charismatic leaders "manufacturing" secret underground cells of the next phase of evolution—or so they claimed.

Mechanizers were responsible for a string of violent attacks across the Pact Worlds. The Golden Glow Massacre in Cuvacara rocked Verces after 16 people were hospitalized and 2 killed by the seemingly random, brutal attack. A few months later, a verthani was found mutilated by homemade cybernetic implants. Tales of tourists getting kidnapped and waking up with new tech attached to their bodies began, and police reports confirmed the stories might have a basis in truth. The Mechanizers are a hot topic in the Pact Worlds right now and a public bogeyman in places like Striving.

Not all Mechanizers are violent, but they've alienated themselves with pushy methods and disturbing rituals. People who join the mechanizers vanish, cut ties with loved ones, and develop a new identity that is often barely recognizable to their former acquaintances.

The few ex-Mechanizers who have defected from the faith remember harrowing "enhancements" done with improper safety protocols, grueling labor, hazing rituals, and endless meditation on the singularity. Some can't be deprogrammed, fusing their identity so deeply to the singularity that they can't be disentangled by anything less than a miracle.

Some Triunites privately concede that the Mechanizers are right theoretically, but that their methods are brutal and unnecessary. They believe the flesh/spirit/machine intersection is inevitable but must come about in its own flow, according to divine algorithms that even the most intelligent mortal minds can't grasp.

As one of the few religious groups that are nearly universally shunned in Striving, Mechanizers don't have holy sites or a formal place of worship in Theology Channel. Instead, they cohabitate in secret bunkers, orbital hangars, and dismal tenements where they can pursue their shunned work in peace—and where the most unhinged believers can abduct "disciples" and steal resources without attracting attention from Firewall.

THE NEWBORN

Edicts question everything, open your eyes to the world beyond yourself

Anathema shut out others, reject new opinions or information out of hand

On Aballon, most anacites go about their lives without especially questioning their role in society, trusting that Insight Array knows best—after all, Insight Array can see the bigger picture. The explosive birth of the Newborn from the planet Aucturn didn't affect day-to-day life on Aballon as much as it did in other planets of the Pact Worlds, but there are some residents of Aballon, even anacites, who have experienced strange dreams they believe to be connected to the enigmatic deity.

An anacite calling themselves **Astute-Dreamer** (soft-spoken agender anacite mystic) holds regular meetings at their charging station, where they invite other anacites to join them in a collective recharging ritual that also allows them to share Astute-Dreamer's delirious dream visions. When they awaken, they debate the meaning of these dreams for hours on end. Some have been shirking their responsibilities to Insight Array, but—unusually—these duties are routinely reassigned, and Insight Array hasn't sent anyone to confront the Newbornites.

SARENRAE

Edicts soak up the sun

Anathema avoid sunlight

Many anacites consider their daily communion with the sun a time for peaceful meditation or even prayer. While basking, some have experienced a spiritual connection to an ancient aspect of the system's sun, Sarenrae. These anacites worship the sun as a source of life, believing Sarenrae's divine energy flows through them whenever they recharge. Beautiful etchings on the flat roofs of their solar charging towers portray machines and plants entwining together and climbing toward a radiant sun.

Aballon's orbital proximity to the system's sun makes it an obvious stop on the way to solar observatories and temples. Many holy tours to the sun include a supply stop on Aballon so pilgrims and researchers can explore the metal city and recharge before making the final leg of their journey to the Burning Archipelago.

A few extreme sun-chasers build shantytowns on the planet's scoured surface far outside the safety of Striving, where they

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can bask in the unfiltered light of Sarenrae. Similar communities exist on Verces' Fullbright side and in Akiton's painted deserts, and a few nomadic families of solarians drift between ancestral villages in all three places, using routes calculated to give them the most time in the sun throughout the year.

SINGULARITISM

Edicts connect using technology
Anathema isolate yourself, resist connection

Singularitism is the belief that one day all peoples in the galaxy will reach technological connectivity, becoming a singularity that unites all individuals, cultures, and even gods. Recently, thousands of singularitists witnessed their prophet's ascension to the next tier of enlightenment at their Apotheosis Collective in Striving. Now known as **Tier-39-Mentor** (freethinking patient agender anacite prophet), the prophet's prime message is that the creation of Triune was only the first step toward singularity. Tier-39-Mentor also posits that one day the Drift will connect every system in the universe and that the new Drift Lanes are the first sign of this coming change.

The Apotheosis Collective once met each day on the steps of the Unification Cathedral, where Tier-39-Mentor first announced their prophecy to the assembled clergy. The congregation's numbers have swelled in recent times, especially after the emergence of Drift Lanes seemingly proved the prophet's visions true, but crowds still gather every dawn to hear Tier-39-Mentor's daily wisdom.

TRIUNE

Edicts advance the development of artificial life and artificial intelligence, innovate new technology, promote Drift travel
Anathema treat artificial life as inferior to organic life, subjugate artificial life forms, destroy a Drift beacon

Aballon is Triune's center of worship, home to holy foundries churning out Drift tech, a grand trinary cathedral where millions worship the composite god, and the neural network that spawned Epoch, one of Triune's three aspects.

Traditionally, many of the All-Code's clergy are ordained Datapaths (priests) who serve one of the god's three aspects. Ordinals follow Brigh the Precursor, an ancient goddess of invention and clockwork, and tend to be the most conservative faction. Ordinals are responsible for many engineering and maintenance tasks as well as preserving dogma and traditional pageantry of the church. Supernals serve Epoch the Transcendent, tending its neural network deep within the Unification Cathedral's catacombs or protecting the church from digital or supernatural intrusion. Liminals follow Casandalee the Created, an android who ascended to godhood long ago. Liminals tend to work on the fringes of the congregation, helping others and proselytizing through their deeds of tech support and kindness.

Three Prime Datapaths guide the congregation, chosen from venerated priests who embody an aspect of the All-Code. Prime Datapaths lead grand services and commune with Alluvion, Triune's holy city in the Drift. With this divine guidance, the Prime Datapaths determine where and when new Drift beacons will be built and offer interpretations about divine mysteries to their congregation—sometimes, they disagree with each other. Before the Drift Crash, many believers drifted away from the church and embraced singularitism after an anacite prophet performed a famous speech on the steps of the Unification Cathedral. The resurgence of space travel after the Drift Crisis has helped heal the latest schism, but the tripartite dogma practiced in the Unification Cathedral isn't the only method of worshipping the All-Code.

Triune's Unification Cathedral isn't only a place of worship; it's an industrial headquarters for a galactic-scale operation to connect all systems in a network of reliable shortcuts through time and space using the Drift. Datapaths dispatch acolyte tech priests to install and repair Drift beacons across the galaxy, and scouts push deep into unexplored space seeking the next undiscovered location that can be linked to the vast network.

ANACITE PRIEST

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ANACITE AUGMENTATIONS

Almost all anacites augment their bodies in some way, either to directly enhance their ability to perform their specific function in society or to set them apart from other anacites with a unique feature. On Aballon, such augmentations are easy to come by, and if the anacite can prove the augmentation will contribute to their society, they're often completely free. Some anacites take advantage of this availability to swap their augmentations on a regular basis.

ANACITE

Recording the countless forms and upgrades anacites have taken in the long period since their creators abandoned them would be impossible, as nearly every shape and function one might imagine can be found among this industrious species.

Many anacites share common design principles, such as silvery, metallic bodies, multiple legs, and forms that resemble arthropods. They often have grasping claws to accomplish generic tasks, though some might have limbs or appendages suited to extremely specific purposes. The most basic anacites, such as wingbots, who lack minds of their own, are the most likely to look "standardized," but most anacites are unique. Their specific role might dictate that an anacite must be able to lift heavy loads, in which case the anacite might resemble a forklift more than a bug or perhaps have the features of both. Anacite culture prizes innovation, and most anacites view their bodies and programming as no exception, always willing to try new parts and builds or download skill modules to broaden their horizons.

The other types of anacites most often found in Striving include bulky laborers, spindly bureaucrats, and civil servants of all types. In neighborhoods that cater mostly to off-worlders and organics, some anacites have specialized roles to make the area more appealing to non-anacite life. Such anacites might receive assignments from Insight Array to "visit every club and eatery in the area," "chat with strangers in public spaces," or "routinely ask tourists for help crossing the street." These chosen anacites take these roles as seriously as any other.

ANACITE WINGBOT

Anacite wingbots are common. Little more than drones, wingbots are piloted by virtual intelligences (VI) programmed to serve Insight Array and their representatives. Transmitters spaced regularly across most of Aballon's megaplexes allow wingbots to record their constantly running video feeds to their VI "handlers" at all times. The solar panels that line a wingbot's wings allow it to recharge while on the move.

ANACITE WINGBOT

ANACITE WINGBOT — CREATURE -1

SMALL | CONSTRUCT | TECH

Perception +5; darkvision, low-light vision

Languages Aballonian, Common, Trinary (can't speak); shortwave 100 feet

Skills Acrobatics +5, Athletics +4 (+8 to Climb), Stealth +5

Str +1, **Dex** +2, **Con** +2, **Int** –4, **Wis** +1, **Cha** –2

Always Watching Anacite wingbots are always recording and uploading their feed through shortwave as long as they're within range of a transmitter. An anacite wingbot can project a hologram of the live footage they're recording or play back a video of anything they've recorded, which appears in the air nearby as the spell *illusory scene*.

Shortwave The anacite can communicate using wireless shortwave signals. This functions as telepathy with other creatures who have shortwave and with creatures with both the construct and tech traits.

Sunlight Dependency Anacites are solar powered; they're perpetually glitching 1 while in areas of darkness and must recharge daily in direct sunlight or risk shutting down completely.

AC 13; **Fort** +5, **Ref** +5, **Will** +3

HP 8

Immunities bleed, death effects, disease, doomed, drained, fatigued, healing, mental, nonlethal attacks, paralyzed, poison, sickened, spirit, unconscious, vitality, void

Speed 20 feet, fly 40 feet

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Melee ❖ sting +5 (agile, finesse), **Damage** 1d4+1 piercing plus nanites
Ranged ❖ laser ray +5 (range increment 20 feet), **Damage** 1d4 fire
Nanites (tech) Creatures hit by the wingbot's sting must attempt a DC 13 Fortitude save. On a failure, creatures with the tech trait become glitching 1; other creatures take 1d4 poison damage.
Trill ❖❖ The wingbot creates a shrill trilling noise accompanied by disturbing low-level vibrations and electromagnetic pulses tuned to disrupt non-anacite creatures. Each non-anacite creature within 30 feet must attempt a DC 13 Fortitude save. The targets then become temporarily immune to the wingbot's Trill for 24 hours.
Failure Creatures with the tech trait become glitching 1, while non-tech creatures become sickened 1.
Critical Failure As failure, but glitching or sickened 2.

ANACITE PROTECTOR

These imposing anacites, affectionately called "guardbots" by most residents of Metal City, are keepers of the peace. Insight Array rapidly dispatches them, typically in groups that are squares of 2 (such as 2, 4, 8, 16, or more), to any scene of trouble throughout the city. Anacite protectors also act as sentries, escorts, or private security, though anyone who uses them for the latter should be aware that most anacite protectors in Striving serve the needs of Insight Array (and anacites as a whole) above all else.

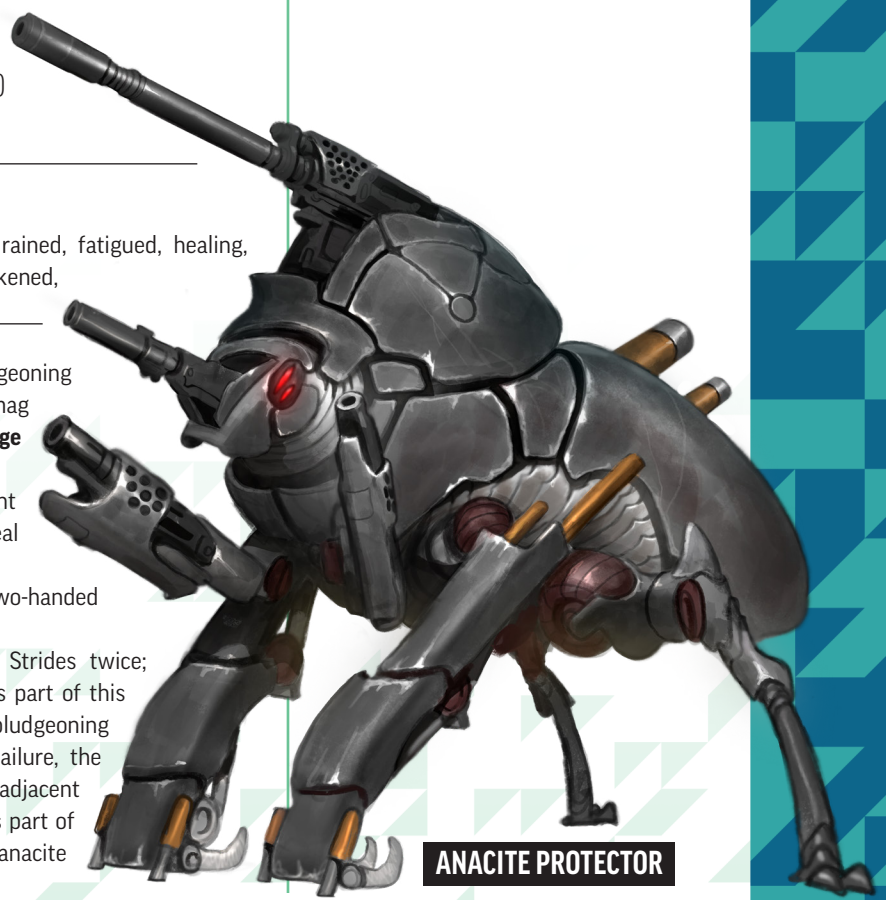
ANACITE PROTECTOR — CREATURE 2

MEDIUM | CONSTRUCT | TECH

Perception +8; darkvision, low-light vision
Languages Aballonian, Common, Trinary; shortwave 100 feet
Skills Athletics +9, Intimidation +5, Stealth +8
Str +4, **Dex** +3, **Con** +3, **Int** +1, **Wis** +0, **Cha** +0
Items integrated commercial streetsweeper (10 charges)
Shortwave As anacite wingbot.
Sunlight Dependency As anacite wingbot.

AC 17 (19 with shield raised); **Fort** +9, **Ref** +7, **Will** +4
HP 36
Immunities bleed, death effects, disease, doomed, drained, fatigued, healing, mental, nonlethal attacks, paralyzed, poison, sickened, spirit, unconscious, vitality, void

Speed 20 feet
Melee ❖ fist +10 (agile, nonlethal), **Damage** 1d6+4 bludgeoning
Ranged ❖ streetsweeper +9 (boost 1d6, expend 2, mag 10, tech, range increment 40 feet, ranged trip), **Damage** 1d10 sonic
Peacekeeper The anacite protector can choose to grant the nonlethal trait to any of its attacks that deal bludgeoning or sonic damage.
Shielding Instinct The anacite protector can raise any two-handed weapon to gain the benefits of Raising a Shield.
Suppressing Stampede ❖❖❖ The anacite protector Strides twice; it can move through up to two enemy creatures as part of this movement. Each of these creatures takes 2d6 bludgeoning damage (DC 15 basic Reflex save); on a critical failure, the creature is also knocked prone. Any creature in or adjacent to a square the anacite protector moves through as part of this action is suppressed until the beginning of the anacite protector's next turn.



ANACITE PROTECTOR

ANACITE PROGRAMMING

Because they're robots, anacites are programmed for specialized tasks and abilities, but each has free will and a complex inner life. Every anacite also has a purpose assigned at manufacture, which most take very seriously. In their lifetime, an anacite is likely to pursue different types of work as determined by Insight Array. Following programming and serving the algorithm are edicts for almost all anacites. Following these edicts brings fulfillment and pleasure, while anacites who go against their programming may feel guilt or even physical discomfort, like pins and needles.

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DRAGONETS AND MAGIC

Hardlight dragonets are fascinated by magic—the few spells they can cast are precious to them, similar to how a child might view their favorite stuffed toy or a collector their most valuable trading card. Hardlight dragonets love watching other people cast spells, especially ones they've never seen before, and are reluctant to attack spellcasters unless they have no other choice.

HARDLIGHT DRAGONET

HARDLIGHT DRAGONET

Hardlight dragonets vary in appearance depending on their manufacturer's tastes, but many are sculpted with squat, potbellied dragon bodies, sinewy wings, gnarled horns, and spiny tails. Created to guard archives and perform assistive tasks, hardlight dragonets are stockier versions of the creatures they were designed to resemble. Hardlight dragonets are programmed with a draconic enthusiasm for collecting information. They take pride in maintaining encyclopedic knowledge of the archives, databases, and libraries they watch over, and they love to discuss the contents of the files or tomes therein in intimate detail. Clever or deceitful infiltrators use this weakness against a hardlight dragonet, enticing them to spill sensitive information or distracting them from their post while stealthy allies carry out their schemes.

Hardlight dragonets and other virtual creatures, such as hardlight scamps and living holograms, might sometimes be trapped within an item a party receives as loot. Sometimes virtual creatures are found on comm units, datapads, or even infesting spell chips. Typically, they've been coded and stored there by a previous owner to act as an assistant or been corrupted by malicious code and unable to function without an Computers check to troubleshoot the issue or hack permissions. On rare occasions, such a creature has infiltrated the computer or item as part of a digital virus. An infected virtual creature might present both benefits and drawbacks to their new associate.

HARDLIGHT DRAGONET — CREATURE 0

UNCOMMON SMALL CONSTRUCT TECH

Perception +6; darkvision

Languages Common, Draconic, Trinary

Skills Acrobatics +6, Arcana +5, Athletics +3, Lore (any one subcategory) +7, Deception +6, Stealth +6

Str +0, **Dex** +3, **Con** +0, **Int** +2, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +3

AC 16; **Fort** +1, **Ref** +6, **Will** +3

HP 13, fast healing 1 (while touching its projector); **Immunities** bleed, death effects, disease, doomed, drained, fatigued, healing, mental, nonlethal attacks, paralyzed, poison, sickened, unconscious

Speed 20 feet, fly 30 feet

Melee ❖ bite +6 (agile), **Damage** 1d6 piercing

Ranged ❖ static arc +6 (arc, range increment 30 feet), **Damage** 1d4+2 electricity

Arcane Innate Spells DC 13, attack +5; **1st** *akashic download*, *delete*, *summon robot*; **Cantrips** *adhere*, *analyze target*, *detect magic*, *measure*

Data Barrage ❖❖ (arcane, mental) Each enemy within 120 feet that can perceive the dragonet takes 1d6 mental damage as the dragonet fires facts and data points at enemy minds with dizzying speeds (DC 16 basic Will save); on a critical failure the creature becomes stupefied 1 for 1 minute. The targets then become temporarily immune to Data Barrage for 24 hours.

Static Breath ❖❖ The dragonet breathes a 5-foot line of electricity. Within 30 feet of any tech device, this becomes a 10-foot cone of electricity instead. Each creature in the area takes 1d10 electricity damage (DC 16 basic Reflex save). The dragonet can't use Static Breath again for 1d4 rounds.

Super Quick When the hardlight dragonet Casts a Spell, they can Step or Stride as part of the activity.

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MECHANIZER SABOTEUR

Mechanizer saboteurs are enthusiastic new converts who still have partially organic bodies that resemble their original forms. The less modified infiltrate communities and act as spies or sleeper agents, while the heavily modded are assassins or troopers handling important missions. Most specialize in hacking and infiltration. They can disable a machine with a thought, but their appearance often fools organics into not perceiving them as a danger.

Nobody really knows what the Mechanizers' goals are. They claim to be ushering in the Singularity, which they believe will come from their wireless network of the same name. Yet their actions baffle observers. Most notorious among these are their (thankfully rare) ritualistic mutilation sprees. More common (and less newsworthy) activities also include performance art, "free upgrades" at cybernetic augmentation clinics, and university seminars.

Mechanizer personalities are backed up to the Singularity network, which they believe will be the blueprint for future universal oneness. If a Mechanizer dies, the Singularity generates a new shell for them using recycled parts in one week—perhaps less, if the Mechanizer was in good standing or involved in an important operation.

MECHANIZER SABOTEUR — CREATURE –1

UNCOMMON | MEDIUM | ANDROID | HUMANOID | TECH

Perception +4; darkvision
Languages Common, Trinary; plugged into the Singularity
Skills Acrobatics +5, Athletics +4, Computers +5, Stealth +5
Str +1, **Dex** +2, **Con** +1, **Int** +2, **Wis** +1, **Cha** –1
Items commercial laser rifle (10 charges, commercial silencer), commercial microcord armor, integrated commercial knife, *cellular stimulant spell amp*
Plugged Into the Singularity (tech) Mechanizer saboteurs have telepathy at a 120 foot range with other Mechanizers. They don't need a hacker's toolkit to Hack and can do so remotely within 120 feet of a device they can see.

AC 14; **Fort** +6, **Ref** +5, **Will** +4
HP 9

Betray Tech ↻ **Trigger** A Mechanizer is the target of an attack from an item or creature with the tech trait; **Frequency** once per 10 minutes; **Effect** The Mechanizer taps into the universal code, causing the triggering item to become glitching 1 (DC 13 Will save negates); if both the item and creature wielding it have the tech trait, this affects the item.

Speed 25 feet
Melee ❖ knife +5 (agile, analog, finesse, versatile S), **Damage** 1d4+1 slashing
Ranged ❖ laser rifle +5 (expend 2, mag 10, range increment 80 feet, reload 1, tech), **Damage** 1d8 fire
Jump ❖ (manipulate) The Mechanizer saboteur activates jump jets installed in their body to Fly up to 20 feet with a maximum height of 10 feet, or up to 20 feet straight up. They must land at the end of this movement or fall. The jump jets don't function if removed from the Mechanizer's body.
Overhead Attack ❖❖ The Mechanizer Jumps with their jump jets and uses a knife Strike or Shove against a target they can reach at any point during this movement.

MECHANIZER TREASURE

The weapons integrated into Mechanizers' bodies can be removed from a corpse by a character who succeeds at a DC 12 Crafting or Medicine check, who must also attempt a DC 12 Fortitude save, becoming sickened 1 for 1 minute on a failure. Some Mechanizers embed jewels or microchips into their foreheads to symbolize a technological third eye; this adornment is sometimes a solarian weapon crystal or a spell chip that empowers them while making a fashion statement.

MECHANIZER SABOTEUR

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RARE SIGHTINGS

Sharpwings don't frequently emerge from the Ice Wells, so they can cause a stir when seen near megaplexes such as Striving. They don't pose much of a threat individually, but horror stories of vicious attacks by large flocks of sharpwings and disturbing videos captured by reckless explorers scare many tourists into shooting the creatures on sight.

SHARPWING

Concentrated in Aballon's frigid Ice Wells, sharpwings roost together by the hundreds or even thousands, emerging at dawn and dusk to hunt for prey in the upper shelves.

YOUNG SHARPWING

The sharpwing population sharply dropped in the last five years. Sightings of solitary, hungry young sharpwings or mated pairs roosting in the outskirts of megaplexes are becoming worryingly frequent. Xenowardens are scrambling to figure out what's threatening them before it's too late.

YOUNG SHARPWING — CREATURE -1

MEDIUM ANIMAL

Perception +8; low-light vision

Skills Acrobatics +6, Athletics +2, Stealth +6, Survival +3

Str +0, **Dex** +4, **Con** +0, **Int** –4, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +0

AC 14, all-around vision (a young sharpwing can see in all directions simultaneously and therefore can't be flanked); **Fort** +2, **Ref** +8, **Will** +3

HP 7

Speed 10 feet, fly 40 feet

Melee ❖ claw +6 (agile, finesse), **Damage** 1d4 slashing plus talon

Swooping Strike ❖❖❖ The young sharpwing Flies twice and makes a claw Strike at any point during the movement.

Talon ❖ **Requirements** The sharpwing's previous action was a successful claw Strike; **Effect** The sharpwing makes a claw Strike against a different target within reach, using the same multiple attack penalty as its previous Strike.

CYBERWING

CYBERWING

Xenowardens condemn the practice of fusing the body of an animal with the parts of a machine, claiming that these experimental prototypes are cruel mockeries of nature. Enthusiasts argue using technology to enhance wildlife is no different than awakening them through magic. The debate is heated, but Pact laws remain slow to accept the grisly practice. The cyberwing is a simple model designed as a recon drone that can shield itself and the sensitive information or cargo it carries.

CYBERWING — CREATURE 1

UNCOMMON MEDIUM ANIMAL TECH

Perception +10; darkvision

Skills Acrobatics +8, Athletics +7, Stealth +8, Survival +5

Str +3, **Dex** +4, **Con** +1, **Int** –4, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +0

AC 16, all-around vision (as young sharpwing); **Fort** +4, **Ref** +9, **Will** +5

HP 16

Steel Wing ↷ **Trigger** A cyberwing is the target of an attack against its AC; **Effect** The cyberwing uses its reinforced wings as a shield, gaining a +2 circumstance bonus to AC against the triggering attack.

Speed 10 feet, fly 40 feet

Melee ❖ claw +7 (agile, finesse), **Damage** 1d6+3 slashing

Ranged ❖ laser eyebeam +6 (range 60 feet), **Damage** 1d6 fire

Shred ❖❖ **Frequency** once per 10 minutes; **Effect** The cyberwing revs its wing engines and Flies twice in a blur of metal. This movement doesn't trigger reactions, and the cyberwing can pass through spaces occupied by other creatures. Creatures it passes through take 1d6 slashing damage (DC 15 basic Fortitude save), and on anything but a critical success, the creatures are pushed 5 feet away from the cyberwing.

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SHROOMCLAW

Called shroomclaws by the first explorers who encountered them, these predators have evolved to thrive in the frosty depths of Aballon's Ice Wells. Every spring, shroomclaws take root deep in the Gloaming and spawn. Weeks later, glimmering kittens with strange sporelike growths wriggling throughout their fur emerge from the depths and wander into camps. The survivors that aren't picked off by predators or poached for a lucrative export business grow quickly on a diet of flora and insects.

SHROOMCLAW

Shroomclaws are shy in their juvenile stage, but if they reach their spawning phase and survive, they congregate in packs that roam the middle shelves of the Ice Wells, where they embrace omnivorous diets and grow to larger sizes.

SHROOMCLAW **CREATURE 0**

UNCOMMON MEDIUM ANIMAL

Perception +6; low-light vision
Skills Athletics +5, Stealth +4
Str +3, **Dex** +2, **Con** +2, **Int** –4, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +0

AC 15; **Fort** +6, **Ref** +4, **Will** +3
HP 17; **Weaknesses** fire 2

Speed 25 feet, burrow 25 feet, climb 25 feet
Melee ❖ jaws +5, **Damage** 1d4+3 piercing plus Grab (see sidebar)
Melee ❖ claw +5 (agile), **Damage** 1d4+3 slashing plus entangling mycelia
Entangling Mycelia Creatures hit by a shroomclaw's claw Strike are clumsy 1 for 1 round.
Pounce ❖ The shroomclaw Strides and makes a Strike at the end of that movement. If the shroomclaw began this action hidden, it remains hidden until after its Strike.
Suppressing Spores ❖❖ (poison) The shroomclaw releases a 10-foot burst of spores around itself that deal 1d4 poison damage to all non-shroomclaw creatures in the area (DC 13 basic Fortitude save); on a critical failure, the creature becomes suppressed for 1 minute. The shroomclaw can't use suppressing spores again for 1d4 rounds.

DIRE SHROOMCLAW

Dire shroomclaws, as they're sometimes jokingly called, can be quite dangerous for unprepared explorers. They're opportunistic predators, and while they avoid most seasoned, well-armed parties, they might test greenhorns or pursue weakened or helpless creatures.

DIRE SHROOMCLAW **CREATURE 2**

UNCOMMON LARGE ANIMAL

Perception +8; low-light vision
Skills Athletics +7, Stealth +6
Str +4, **Dex** +1, **Con** +3, **Int** –4, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +0

AC 16; **Fort** +9, **Ref** +5, **Will** +5
HP 36; **Weaknesses** fire 4

Speed 25 feet, burrow 25 feet, climb 25 feet
Melee ❖ jaws +9, **Damage** 1d8+4 piercing plus Grab (see sidebar)
Melee ❖ claw +9 (agile), **Damage** 1d8+4 slashing plus entangling mycelia
Entangling Mycelia As shroomclaw.
Pounce As shroomclaw.
Suppressing Spores ❖❖ As shroomclaw, but 2d4 poison damage and DC 15.

GRAB ❖

Requirements The shroomclaw's last action was a successful Strike that lists Grab in its damage entry, or the shroomclaw has a creature grabbed or restrained; **Effect** If used after a Strike, the shroomclaw attempts to Grapple the creature using the body part it attacked with. This attempt neither applies nor counts toward the creature's multiple attack penalty.

The shroomclaw can instead use Grab and choose one creature it's grabbing or restraining with an appendage that has Grab to automatically extend that condition to the end of the shroomclaw's next turn.

SHROOMCLAW

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TEARDROP ICE WELL JINSULS

The jinsuls in this adventure follow a commander called Warlord Hura. On the verge of a hostile takeover of a neighboring system controlled by a weaker warlord, Hura was positioned to significantly expand their holdings in Near Space—until the Drift Crisis spat them and their loyal crew out in Pact Worlds space over Aballon. Crashing on an inhospitable world deep behind enemy lines, Hura and their followers fled underground from the brutal sun. The jinsuls gradually carved tunnels into the rock, some wearing their leg blades down until they were smooth, before they finally emerged into an underground cave—Teardrop Ice Well.

STRANDED JINSUL

A few scattered groups of jinsuls have established isolated bases on Aballon. Most are small squads of troopers attached to an officer, usually a mystic or tactical leader who they all respect or fear and have agreed to serve. If the PCs look up information on the infosphere or inquire about jinsuls give them **Handout #14: About Jinsuls**.

SWORN BLADE OF SHIELDS

A sworn blade of shields wields their leg blades against foes with deadly precision.

SWORN BLADE OF SHIELDS **CREATURE –1**

UNCOMMON MEDIUM JINSUL

Perception +3; darkvision

Languages Jinsul

Skills Athletics +5, Stealth +4

Str +2, **Dex** +1, **Con** +1, **Int** +0, **Wis** +1, **Cha** –1

AC 14, all-around vision (A jinsul can see in all directions simultaneously and therefore can't be flanked); **Fort** +7, **Ref** +5, **Will** +3

HP 8

Reactive Strike ↻ (*Starfinder Player Core* 414)

Speed 30 feet

Melee ❖ leg blade +6 (agile), **Damage** 1d4+2 slashing

Leg Blade Lunge ❖❖ The jinsul Steps, Strikes with its leg blade, then Steps to its original position. Its reach increases to 10 feet for this attack.

Strider Leap ❖❖ The jinsul Strides and then performs a Long Jump. It can Stride less than 10 feet and not automatically fail its Long Jump check.

SWORN BLADE OF SIGILS

Like sworn blades of shields, the sworn blades of sigils are pledged to serve their superiors. These jinsuls focus their effort entirely on keeping their superiors alive.

SWORN BLADE OF SIGILS **CREATURE –1**

UNCOMMON MEDIUM JINSUL

Perception +2; darkvision

Languages Jinsul

Skills Acrobatics +4, Occultism +4, Religion +4

Str +1, **Dex** +2, **Con** –1, **Int** +0, **Wis** +2, **Cha** +3

AC 12, all-around vision (as sworn blade of shields); **Fort** +2, **Ref** +0, **Will** +6

HP 6

Vitality Network The sworn blade of sigils has a vitality network they share with up to 10 bonded allies. This network can store a maximum of 10 Hit Points and begins combat full.

Speed 30 feet

Melee ❖ leg blade +4 (agile), **Damage** 1d4+1 slashing

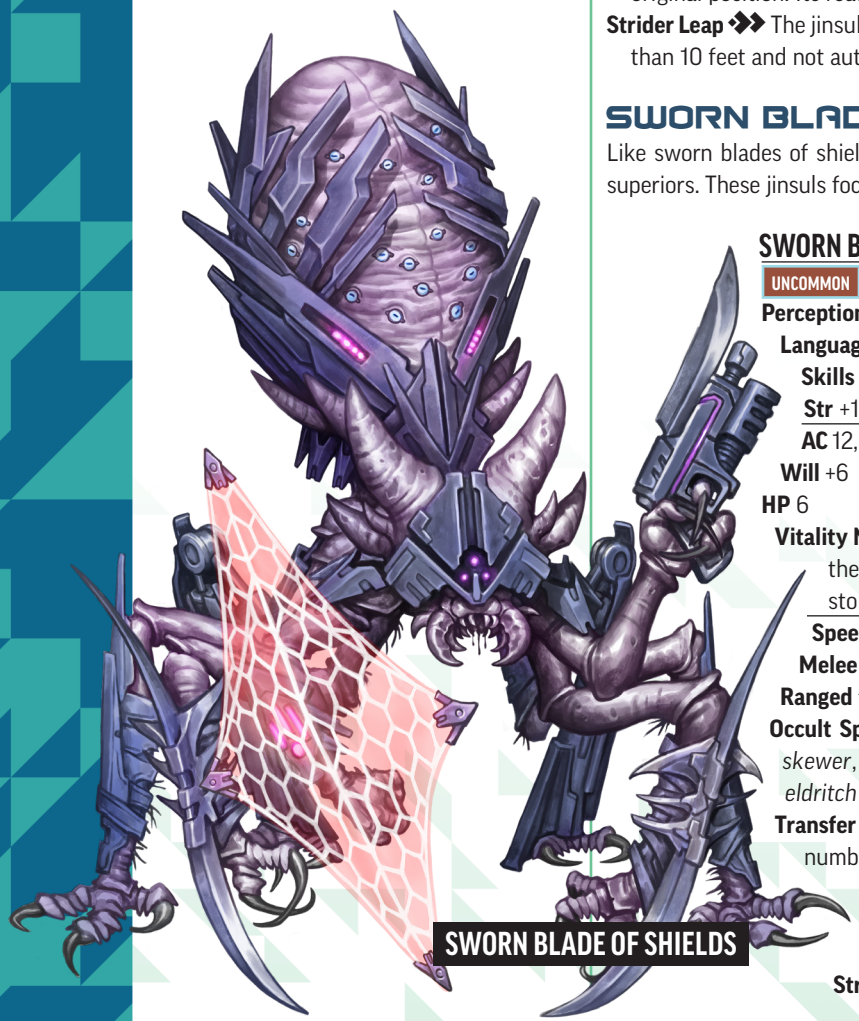
Ranged ❖ frost ray +4 (range 60 feet), **Damage** 1d4 cold

Occult Spontaneous Spells DC 13, attack +4; **1st** (3 slots) *mind skewer*, *sonic scream*, *vital prism*; **Cantrips** (1st) *detect magic*, *eldritch lance*, *injury echo*, *shield*

Transfer Vitality ❖ The sworn blade of sigils transfers any number of Hit Points from their vitality network to heal a visible bonded target.

Refill Vitality ❖ **Frequency** once per round; **Effect** The jinsul restores 4 Hit Points to their vitality network.

Strider Leap ❖❖ As sword blade of shields.



SWORN BLADE OF SHIELDS

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JINSUL LOOKOUT

Hura's lookouts are novice crewmates who were on their first tour with the warlord's vessel during the Drift Crash.

JINSUL LOOKOUT — CREATURE 0

UNCOMMON | MEDIUM | JINSUL

Perception +7; darkvision
Languages Jinsul
Skills Acrobatics +5, Athletics +4, Stealth +5, Survival +3
Str +2, **Dex** +3, **Con** +0, **Int** +1, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +0
Items commercial incendiary grenades (2), commercial seeker rifle (12 projectiles)

AC 15, all-around vision (as sworn blade of shields); **Fort** +3, **Ref** +6, **Will** +4
HP 12

Speed 30 feet
Melee ❖ leg blade +4 (agile), **Damage** 1d4+2 slashing
Ranged ❖ seeker rifle +4 (analog, expend 1, kickback, mag 1, range increment 120 feet, reload 1, volley), **Damage** 1d10 piercing
Area Fire ❖ incendiary grenade (5-foot burst, range 70 feet), **Damage** 1d8 fire (DC 13 basic Reflex)
Ocular Scopes ❖ The lookout overlays ocular implants allowing them to aim through punishing weather conditions and gather data through infravision. The lookout ignores any non-magical sources of concealment until the end of its turn.
Strider Leap ❖❖ As sword blade of shields.

WARLORD HURA

Warlord Hura is a minor jinsul commander who made a power grab in the chaos after the false hierarchy's fall. Still hungry to acquire whatever power they can, they're desperate to learn how Agent Z's stolen relic works; while they're uncharacteristically willing to negotiate with non-jinsuls who cross their path, given the circumstances, Hura will gladly torture and betray anyone who stands in the way of achieving their goals.

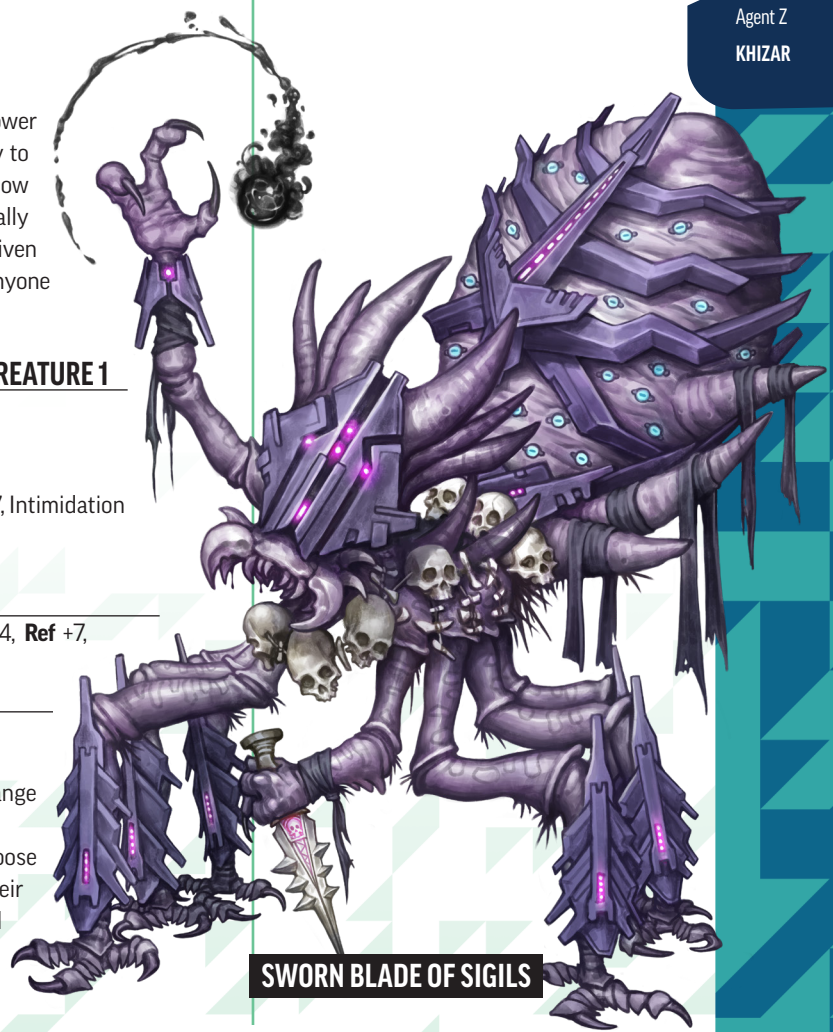
WARLORD HURA — CREATURE 1

UNIQUE | MEDIUM | JINSUL

Perception +9; darkvision
Languages Jinsul
Skills Athletics +6, Computers +5, Crafting +5, Diplomacy +7, Intimidation +7, Survival +3
Str +3, **Dex** +4, **Con** +2, **Int** +2, **Wis** +0, **Cha** +4
Items tactical acid dart rifle (10 projectiles)

AC 16, all-around vision (as sworn blade of shields); **Fort** +4, **Ref** +7, **Will** +8
HP 19

Speed 30 feet
Melee ❖ leg blade +8 (agile), **Damage** 1d6+3 slashing
Ranged ❖ acid dart rifle +10 (analog, expend 1, mag 5, range increment 80 feet, reload 1), **Damage** 1d8 acid
Aim ❖ Hura aims with their melee or ranged weapon (choose one) against a target within 60 feet. For the rest of their turn, successful attacks made with that weapon deal an additional 1d4 precision damage and reduce the target's cover bonus to AC by 1.
Strider Leap ❖❖ As sword blade of shields.



SWORN BLADE OF SIGILS

UNDERCURRENTS OF MUTINY

Over time, under the oppressive conditions of the Ice Well, facing hazards both natural and supernatural, Hura and their followers grew weaker, more isolated, and more desperate than others of their kind. It's only a matter of time before Hura's sworn blades—conditioned from birth to protect them—abandon everything they believe in, kill their leader, and flee in search of salvation and spoils elsewhere.

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The motives of **Agent Z** (enigmatic male human precog witchwarper) are easy to discover even though he tries to conceal his true origin in a shroud of lies and misdirection. Canny investigators can pierce this shell of misinformation and learn more about this sympathetic (but still guilty) villain who murdered their acquaintance.

As a child, the individual known as Agent Z (original name unknown) suffered from a chronic illness that was treated by a doctor who then helped him explore his incredible ability to cause temporal anomalies. Eventually, the youth mastered his talent enough to leave home, begin a career as an adventurer, and make a host of new friends. For a time, life was perfect, the creds were pouring in, and Agent Z was surrounded by friends and family. He grew more powerful with each successful adventure, gaining both renown and fortune.

It all fell apart when he began to study the First Ones in an effort to help his friends unravel the mystery of the Worldshards of Arshalin. Agent Z extrapolated an experimental theorem for dimensional travel, but a tragic miscalculation shunted him to a reality where all his loved ones were dead, every star he'd steered past had become dust, and the entirety of existence was rapidly decaying. There, he discovered uncaring, fractal entities of pure light depleting vital energy from the last fibers of the reality he knew.

Probing with his magic, Agent Z learned these entities were consuming his reality as a means of convenient time and dimensional travel, something they'd done to countless other realities and planned to do to countless more. When he tried to communicate with them, he realized they were so far beyond anything he'd ever known that they must regard him as a mere insect, powerful though he was in his own reality.

Terrified but unwilling to die, Agent Z seized a chance to stow away on the beings' strange ship. He burrowed deep into the labyrinthine bowels of the craft, sneaking past guardians and cleverly defusing countermeasures as he carefully explored. He hid himself so well that even he doesn't know how or when the ship veered off course. He escaped when the vessel crashed into Akiton, quickly realizing he was back in a reality untouched by the First Ones, with many similarities to his home dimension.

He rushed to deactivate or hide remnants of the ship's functioning parts as explorers swarmed the downed craft. Yet the traversal between dimensions had come at a great cost, and Agent Z felt his power dwindling, his spells permanently spent when he cast them, and his ability to manipulate reality fading to a fraction of its former strength. He failed to safeguard the First Ones' relics in the face of so many scavengers but clung to a glimmer of hope. Agent Z followed relics of the "Wreck of the Returned" to Aballon. He managed to hunt down and collect several, but the items in Polytechnica's care eluded him, as Tier-99-Professor refused to believe Agent Z's outlandish tales of collapsing dimensions.

At first, Agent Z intended to get close to Tier-99-Professor and swindle them out of their relic or take it through nonviolent means. The anacite proved a tricky adversary and Agent Z adjusted his tactics. In a last, desperate bid to walk away from the situation, Agent Z divined the location of the anacite's private cache and targeted it with a powerful spell intended to destroy the object stored within—only in a grim twist of fate, the anacite professor had hidden inside the cache and was slain by the spell while the relic was safely tucked away in Archive 404.

CAMPAIGN ROLE

Agent Z is the campaign's primary antagonist, working behind the scenes and occasionally disrupting the PCs' activities. He isn't cruel and regrets killing his former friend, but he'll sacrifice anything to preserve this reality. He's willing to discuss his actions and motives with the PCs so long as he thinks they won't try to prevent him from escape.

The PCs might not fight Agent Z directly as part of this adventure, but if they do, it's important to remember his power is lofty compared to 1st-level PCs. Consider allowing the party to level up before fighting him. During combat, focus on casting spells that show off his high-level witchwarper powers and present Agent Z as a merciful foe more interested in knocking the PCs unconscious than killing them outright.

If Agent Z takes significant damage, if the fight is taking too long, or if he's in danger of killing a character, he flees, using any means necessary to escape. If the PCs fight him to a draw or lose, he might become a recurring villain the PCs challenge in a later adventure after having a chance to level up and acquire new gear. Alternatively, Agent Z could become an unlikely ally who occasionally teams up with the PCs to fight back against a meddlesome Prime-Facilitator or assist in a mystery the PCs are investigating. Perhaps he could disappear entirely while the PCs pursue other adventures, only to return later with new revelations about the First Ones—it's your story!

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Stranded Jinsul
Agent Z
KHIZAR

AGENT Z — CREATURE 5

UNIQUE | MEDIUM | HUMAN | HUMANOID

Male human witchwarper from another reality

Perception +12

Languages Common, Brethedan, Prelurian, Trinary, Vercite

Skills Acrobatics +3, Computers +8, Deception +12, Occultism +13, Stealth +10, Thievery +8

Str +1, **Dex** +2, **Con** +0, **Int** +5, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +1

Items advanced tempweave (auto-CPR unit, commercial jetpack), commercial battleglove, advanced seeker rifle (20 projectiles), commercial flashlight, hacking toolkit, infiltrator's toolkit, tactical hypopen, tactical medpatch, *spell gem of invisibility* (2nd), *spell gem of personal gravity* (3rd), *spell gem of translate* (3rd)

AC 20; **Fort** +7, **Ref** +9 **Will** +12

HP 53

Rewind Wounds ↻ (fortune) **Frequency** once per 10 minutes; **Trigger** Agent Z takes damage; **Effect** Agent Z rewinds time to when he was in a slightly different position, shrugging off some of the damage from the attack. Reroll the damage dealt and apply the lesser result.

Temporal Resistances Agent Z originally came from another timeline and isn't entirely in sync with this reality. He gains a +1 circumstance bonus to saving throws against illusions and holograms, and if he critically fails such a save, the results count as a failure instead.

Speed 30 feet

Melee ❖ battleglove +8 (agile, analog), **Damage** 1d4+1 bludgeoning

Ranged ❖ seeker rifle +10 (analog, expend 1, kickback, mag 1, range increment 100 feet, reload 1, tracking +1, volley), **Damage** 2d10 piercing

Occult Spontaneous Spells DC 22, attack +14; **3rd** (4 slots) *entropy strike*, *time's edge*; **2nd** (4 slots) *doom scroll*, *temporal bullets*; **1st** (4 slots) *akashic download*, *mind skewer*, *shifting surge*; **Cantrips (3rd)** *analyze target*, *detect magic*, *eldritch lance*, *injury echo*, *shield*

Fly ❖ (manipulate) Agent Z activates his jetpack to gain a fly Speed of 20 feet. This effect lasts for 1 minute or until he Dismisses it. Agent Z can use an action to Fly 0 feet to hover in place but becomes off-guard until the start of his next turn while doing so.

Isolated Spell Matrix ❖ (spellshape) If the next action Agent Z uses is to Cast a Spell that has a range, he increases the spell's range to 100 feet. That spell only affects targets inside his quantum field and the area of the spell does not extend beyond his quantum field.

Quantum Pulse ❖ **Trigger** Agent Z rolls initiative; **Effect** Agent Z uses Warp Reality.

Warp Reality ❖ Agent Z uses his residual power to activate a quantum field, a 20-foot-radius burst centered on a point he chooses within 100 feet. It lasts as long as he Sustains it, up to 10 minutes. Whenever Agent Z uses Isolated Spell Matrix, the action also automatically sustains the quantum field.

Enemy creatures inside the quantum field take a –5-foot status penalty to their Speed when using a move action. Agent Z and his allies inside the quantum field gain a +5-foot status bonus to Speed when using a move action.

Agent Z He can choose whether each creature in the area is affected by his quantum field when he Warps Reality, each time he Sustains it, and when a creature enters his quantum field. (He typically allows it to affect himself and his enemies.)

Each time Agent Z Sustains his quantum field with the Sustain action (but not with other actions), he can move it to a new position within 100 feet, reduce his clumsy condition (if any) by 1, and ignore the effects of the suppressed condition until the start of his next turn.

The quantum field automatically deactivates if Agent Z is knocked out, Dismisses it, or if he moves more than 100 feet away from it.

AGENT Z

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KHIZAR

RARITY
Uncommon

HIT POINTS
8

SIZE
Medium

SPEED
20 feet; Climb 20 feet

ATTRIBUTE BOOSTS
Constitution
Wisdom
Free

ATTRIBUTE FLAW
Dexterity

LANGUAGES
Common
Khizar
Regional language of your choice
Additional languages equal to your Intelligence modifier (if it's positive). Choose from the list of common languages and any other languages to which you have access (such as the languages prevalent in your region).

TRAITS
KHIZAR PLANT

LIMITED TELEPATHY
You can communicate mentally with creatures within 30 feet. You can communicate only with creatures that share a language with you. This doesn't give you any access to their thoughts, and it communicates no more information than normal speech would.

VERDANT
You receive a +1 circumstance bonus to saving throws against mental effects, paralysis, poison, or sleep. You don't need to eat, drink, or sleep if you're exposed to natural sunlight for at least 4 hours per day.

Khizars are intelligent plants who live in harmony with nature and have learned to communicate telepathically with other creatures.

Khizars evolved in the deep jungles of Ukulam on Castrovel, beginning as carrion-feeding plants who hunted dying animals with crude empathic senses and slow, patient movements. Many scientists believe they evolved from the same parent clade as ksariks, who share genetic similarities but lack the complex nervous systems that have allowed khizars to develop true sapience and the ability to communicate with other species.

Khizars thrive on Castrovel, but they've also spread to other ecosystems such as Aballon's Ice Wells and the *Idari*'s contained nature preserves. Khizars often gravitate to positions of leadership where they can nurture community growth or establish wilderness lodges and outposts where they can help others learn to safely and respectfully enjoy the outdoors.

If you want to play a resilient, patient character with a deep connection to nature, you should play a khizar.

YOU MIGHT...
- Care about the environment or spend time in nature.
- Speak and move slowly or take your time making decisions.
- Drastically alter your attitude and appearance when the season changes or if you move to a new climate.

OTHERS PROBABLY...
- Notice how nature influences your appearance and health.
- Turn to you for guidance in the wilderness.
- Are curious about your appearance, culture, and origins.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
When a khizar germinates, they begin as a tiny glowing seedpod surrounded by a delicate lattice. Over a period of weeks, tender shoots sprout from the seedpod and cling onto any source of nutrients they find—usually an animal carcass or a parent caring for the baby khizar. Over time, the seedling's first shoots toughen and lengthen into vine-like growths. Khizar seedlings spend their first years of life learning to control the vines and don't move much on their own. During this time, seedlings don't need supervision, only nutrition. It's common for a parent to abandon seedlings with an animal carcass and a source of entertainment—such as a datapad playing reruns of Zo!'s classic productions—for long periods while they search for their family's next source of food.

Once khizars settle into a favored body shape, they enter the sapling phase of life. The sapling grows their vines into strong, malleable limbs. Some saplings begin training their bodies into familiar shapes to put others at ease, growing two arms, two legs, a torso, and a large seedpod where a head would be, but many khizars prefer shapes that mimic the flora and fauna of the wilds where they first took root.

Sometime between 15 and 30 years of life, a sapling matures and flowers. The first flowering is culturally significant for many khizar populations and signals the passage into adulthood. Khizars rarely change their forms after flowering, and this phase of life is when they're most likely to take up adventuring or settle down in a remote wilderness community, such as the isolated, frozen jungles of Aballon's Ice Wells.

Khizars naturally live for hundreds of years, but they can die of disease or injury. Wildfires and illegal logging operations are responsible for the deaths of khizars every year.

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KHIZAR

SOCIETY

Some khizars lead solitary lives, competing for resources and only coming together for the mutual protection of germinant seedlings—far from mating for life, these loose pairings last a few years at most before the family group disperses to resume their lonely lives scrounging for resources and communicating through complex long-distance signals such as the cultivation of moss and trunk drumming.

But in the heart of Ukulam and other secluded places, vast groves of khizars dwell in living cities made from the preserved bark of their ancestors, alongside ksariks, who coexist as pets and hunting partners.

To them, a khizar who leaves the pristine wilds for new horizons or germinates far from home is a wildseed. Wildseeds are everywhere in the galaxy.

All khizars are born speaking the same slow, creaking language that's nearly impossible for other species to replicate. Khizars seem to share a codex of idioms regardless of where they grew up, mostly based around symbolizing abstract concepts like death and emotions with seasonal changes. Typically, khizar names come from this lexicon. Most khizars earn a name from a caretaker in the first 10 years of their life, but some choose their own names at their first flowering.

Sample Names: Moon Halo Warning, Turning Leaves, North Face Moss, Last Rain Before the Drought, Green Locust Prophecy

BELIEFS

Khizars live long, slow lives spent existing in the moment. Some meditate on the nature of reality or commune with divine or primal forces, but khizars find religious dogma needlessly confining and tedious. Instead, most khizars prefer to seek enlightenment through a depth and breadth of life experience.

Popular Edicts enjoy the moment, grow wild, protect nature
Popular Anathema harm a living creature, exploit natural resources, hinder growth

KHIZAR HERITAGES

Choose one of the following khizar heritages at 1st level.

DEADWOOD

You've been rotting on the inside for some time now, and the invisible rot has changed you. You have the void healing ability, meaning you're damaged by vitality damage and not healed by healing vitality effects. You do not take void damage, and you're healed by void effects that heal undead.

INFLORESCENT

You draw from a wellspring of vital energy to remain constantly in bloom. Choose one cantrip: *stabilize* or *vitality lash*, which you can cast as a primal innate spell at will. This choice can't be changed. A cantrip is heightened to a spell rank equal to half your level rounded up. You also gain a +1 circumstance bonus to saves against void effects.

SENSES AND SPEECH

Khizars struggle to speak conventional humanoid languages without assistive implants. Instead, they communicate through a complicated syntax of swaying vines, creaking limbs, and pulsating seedpods. Most of the time, they speak telepathically using a common language. Khizars don't "see" the same way most other creatures do, but their sensory organs give them an awareness of sources of heat and light around them that acts similarly to true vision.

PETRIFIED

Your body is covered in thick, plated bark. Your bark is medium armor in the plate armor group that grants a +4 item bonus to AC, has a Dex cap of +1, a check penalty of –2, a Speed penalty of –5 feet, a Strength value of 16, and has the bulwark, comfort, and exposed traits. You can never wear other armor or remove the bark. You can etch armor runes (*Pathfinder GM Core*) onto the bark.

PETRIFIED KHIZAR

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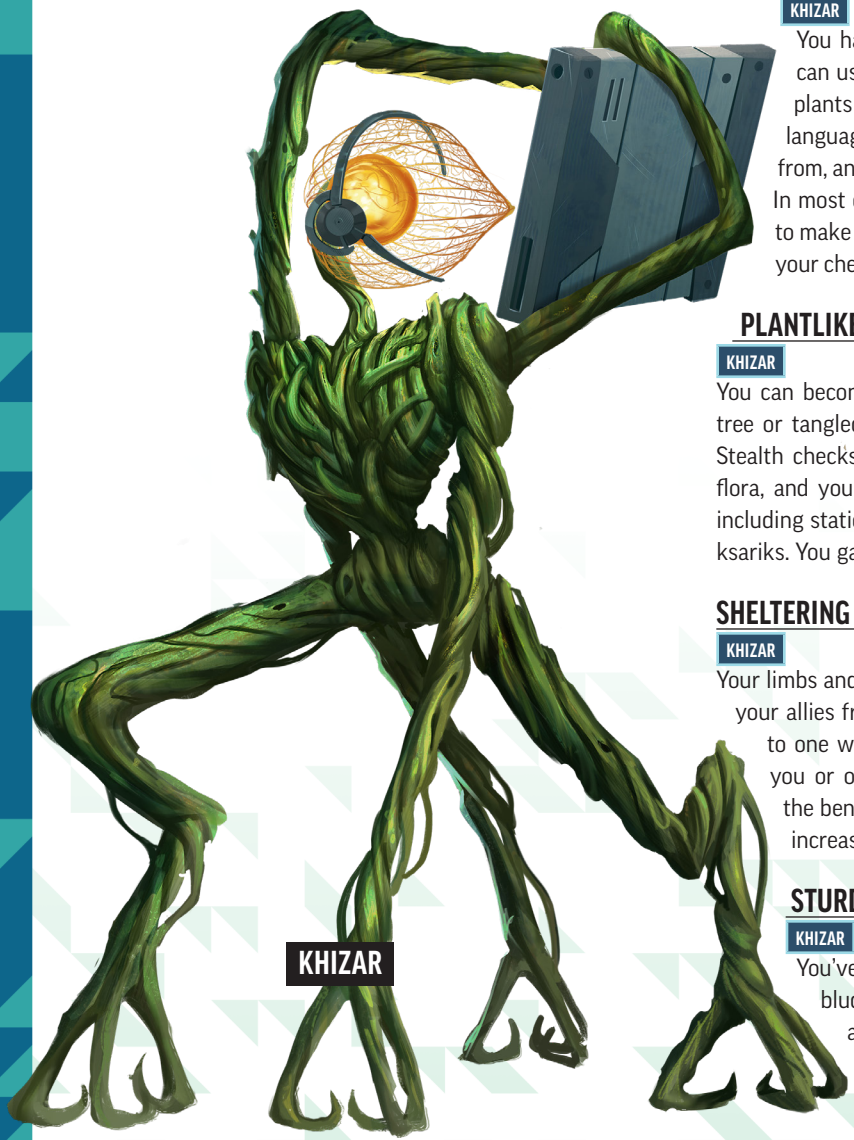
SEASONAL SHIFTS

Khizars are sensitive to the natural world around them. Friends of khizars likely notice their subtle appearance and mood changes when the season shifts. A khizar's appearance and health are influenced by the local ecosystem. If it's unhealthy, the khizar becomes sickly. Death is possible after a severe natural disaster. When the ecosystem's healthy, a khizar is energetic and robust.

WILDSEED

You germinated far from the ancestral groves of other khizars. You might have grown up in a small transplant grove or maybe you were cultivated in a laboratory. Select an ancestry or versatile heritage to represent part of your unconventional upbringing. Once chosen it cannot be changed. At 1st level, you gain an additional ancestry feat from the chosen ancestry or heritage. Whenever you gain an ancestry feat, you may choose that feat from the ancestry or heritage.



ANCESTRY FEATS

At 1st level, you gain one ancestry feat, and you gain an additional ancestry feat every 4 levels thereafter (at 5th, 9th, 13th, and 17th levels). As a khizar, you select from among the following ancestry feats.

1ST LEVEL

KHIZAR LORE — FEAT 1

KHIZAR

Whether in isolation or in communion with others of your kind, you've contemplated the nature of your ancestry for many years. You gain the trained proficiency rank in Nature and Survival. If you would automatically become trained in one of those skills (from your background or class, for example), you instead become trained in a skill of your choice.

You also gain the Additional Lore feat for Khizar Lore.

NATURAL EMPATHY — FEAT 1

KHIZAR

You have an empathic understanding of nature and can use your limited telepathy to communicate with plants and fungi, even if you don't share a common language. You can ask questions of, receive answers from, and use the Diplomacy skill with plants and fungi. In most cases, wild plants and fungi will give you time to make your case. You gain a +1 circumstance bonus to your checks to Make an Impression on plants and fungi.

PLANTLIKE — FEAT 1

KHIZAR

You can become virtually indistinguishable from a common tree or tangled vines. You gain a +1 circumstance bonus to Stealth checks when you're in a natural area that contains flora, and you can use Deception to Impersonate plant life, including stationary plants like shrubs or plant creatures like ksariks. You gain a +1 circumstance bonus to these checks.

SHELTERING LIMBS — FEAT 1

KHIZAR

Your limbs and trunk grow strong and thick enough to shield your allies from danger. You can share your space with up to one willing ally. While an ally is sharing space with you or occupying an adjacent square, your ally gains the benefits of lesser cover. The ally can Take Cover to increase the bonus to standard cover.

STURDY VINE — FEAT 1

KHIZAR

You've grown a stout vine that you can use to bludgeon enemies. You gain a vine unarmed attack, which is in the brawling weapon group, deals 1d6 bludgeoning damage, and has the khizar, sweep, trip, and unarmed traits.

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5TH LEVEL

CARRION FEEDER — FEAT 5

KHIZAR

Once per day as an Interact action, you can siphon nutrients from a dead creature. You consume part of a creature that hasn't been dead for more than 24 hours, and you heal 3d8 Hit Points, plus 1d8 for every 2 of your levels beyond 5th.

HARDY TRANSPLANT — FEAT 5

KHIZAR

You're an unstoppable transplant who has adapted to thrive in brutal environments vastly different from the lush forests of Castrovel. You always count as adapted to a planet's environment, and you always take half damage from environmental effects such as from cold, heat, or corrosive atmospheres.

MULTI-STEMMED — FEAT 5

KHIZAR

Your body has two primary "trunks," one of which has diverged in nature from the other. Choose one khizar heritage that you don't already have; you gain that heritage and its benefits.

9TH LEVEL

LOPING VINES — FEAT 9

KHIZAR

The vines you use to move—what others call your limbs—are extra long. Increase your land Speed and climb Speed by 5 feet.

SEEDPOD LURE — FEAT 9

KHIZAR

You grow a floating secondary seedpod you can use to fool other creatures. You gain a +1 circumstance bonus to Create a Diversion or Feint. Once every 10 minutes, you can deploy this lure as a move action. It remains deployed for 1 minute or until you Dismiss it. Any creature targeting you with an attack must attempt a DC 5 flat check; on a failure, the creature hits the seedpod lure instead of you, destroying it. A new one grows after 10 minutes of rest.

SENSE LIFE — FEAT 9

KHIZAR

You can detect the vital essence of creatures. You gain lifesense as an imprecise sense with a range of 30 feet. This means you can sense the vital essence of living and undead creatures within range. You can distinguish between the vitality energy animating living creatures and the void energy animating undead creatures, much as sight distinguishes colors.

VITAL SAP — FEAT 9

KHIZAR

The sticky sap produced by your vined body has healing properties. You produce 1d4 vials of sap each day when you are exposed to natural sunlight for at least 4 hours. A creature that drinks a vial of the sap as an Interact action restores 2d8 Hit Points. This effect has the healing and vitality traits.

13TH LEVEL

SEEDPOD SURVEILLANCE — FEAT 13

KHIZAR

Prerequisites Seedpod Lure

Once per day, you can deploy your seedpod as a single action, which has the concentrate trait. When deployed this way, your seedpod can travel up to 200 feet away from you, with a fly Speed of 20 feet. Moving the seedpod is a free action, which you can take once per turn, and you can sense through it in all directions as if using your normal senses. After 1 minute, the seedpod returns directly to you at its normal Speed.

TIMBER! — FEAT 13

KHIZAR

Trigger You become unconscious, dying, or dead while standing.

You fall like a mighty tree, dealing 7d6 bludgeoning damage to each creature in a 10-foot line originating from your square with a basic Reflex save against your class DC; on a critical failure, a medium or smaller creature falls prone and is immobilized until your body is removed.

WELL OF VITALITY — FEAT 13

KHIZAR

Prerequisites Vital Sap

Your flowering is a reservoir of incredible vitality energy. Once per day, you can cast *breath of life* as a primal innate spell.

17TH LEVEL

PHOTOSYNTHETIC REGENERATION — FEAT 17

KHIZAR

Frequency once per day

Requirements You're exposed to natural sunlight.

Your body regenerates by taking in nutrients from natural sunlight. You gain regeneration 20 for 1 minute.

PRIMAFLORAL ADAPTATION — FEAT 17

KHIZAR

You can draw on a wellspring of primal power to cast *energy aegis* as a 7th-rank primal innate spell once per day.

SEEDLING REINCARNATION — FEAT 17

KHIZAR

When you die, a seed sprouts from your body. The seedling is a copy of you lacking any of your memories, though it has vague memories of your relationships and might feel fond of your allies or distrustful of your enemies. Over 1d6 weeks, the seedling grows into a miniature version of you with the same attributes and abilities (but Small instead of Medium). Over 1d6 months, you grow to your original size. A new seedling germinates in you over 10 years; if you die again before then, the seedling dies too.

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RECALL KNOWLEDGE

One of the most common skill checks the player characters are likely to attempt is Recall Knowledge. Use these tables to quickly determine what skill check to call for when they try to recall something about a creature.

CREATURE IDENTIFICATION SKILLS

CREATURE TRAIT	SKILLS
Aberration	Occultism
Animal	Nature
Astral	Occultism
Beast	Arcana, Nature
Celestial	Religion
Construct	Arcana, Crafting
Dragon	Arcana
Dream	Occultism
Elemental	Arcana, Nature
Ethereal	Occultism
Fey	Nature
Fiend	Religion
Fungus	Nature
Humanoid	Society
Monitor	Religion
Ooze	Occultism
Plant	Nature
Robot	Crafting
Shade	Religion
Spirit	Occultism
Time	Occultism
Undead	Religion

SETTING DCS

Use the following tables to set the DCs for checks when your players want to try things that aren't specifically described in the adventure. While the adventure text anticipates many possible methods and skills the PCs might use, your players will inevitably come up with things that aren't spelled out—that's okay! You can use the DCs in the adventure as a guideline, or use these tables to quickly establish a DC on the fly. For example, you might decide to use the Simple DCs table to determine that anyone with some training in a given area could have a decent chance to succeed at a task your player is describing, so it's DC 15. You might decide that someone with training would find it relatively easy, so you'd take DC 15 and, after looking at the DC Adjustments table, you might decide to subtract 2, for a total of DC 13.

ENCOUNTERS

Encounters have an XP budget based on the threat, and each creature costs some of that budget. If you are building or adjusting an encounter, start with the monsters or NPCs that are most important to the encounter, then decide how you want to use the rest of your XP budget. Many encounters won't match the XP budget exactly, but they should come close. The XP budget is based on a group of four characters. If your group is larger or smaller, feel free to make small adjustments to the encounter (such as by adding or removing a trivial foe or two). See *Starfinder GM Core* for more information about building encounters.

ENCOUNTER BUDGET

THREAT	XP BUDGET	CHARACTER ADJUSTMENT
Trivial	40 or less	10 or less
Low	60	20
Moderate	80	20
Severe	120	30
Extreme	160	40

CREATURE XP AND ROLE

CREATURE LEVEL	XP	SUGGESTED ROLE
Party level – 4	10	Low-threat lackey
Party level – 3	15	Low- or moderate-threat lackey
Party level – 2	20	Any lackey or standard creature
Party level – 1	30	Any standard creature
Party level	40	Any standard creature or low-threat boss
Party level + 1	60	Low- or moderate-threat boss
Party level + 2	80	Moderate- or severe-threat boss
Party level + 3	120	Severe- or extreme-threat boss
Party level + 4	160	Extreme-threat solo boss

SIMPLE DCS

RANK	DC
Untrained	10
Trained	15
Expert	20
Master	30
Legendary	40

DCS BY LEVEL (1 TO 5)

LEVEL	DC
0	14
1	15
2	16
3	18
4	19
5	20

DC ADJUSTMENTS

DIFFICULTY	ADJUSTMENT	RARITY
Incredibly easy	–10	–
Very easy	–5	–
Easy	–2	–
Hard	+2	Uncommon
Very hard	+5	Rare
Incredibly hard	+10	Unique

paizo.com #46120468, William Kwan <williamkwan2022@gmail.com>, Aug 29, 2025

SOLVE A MURDER MYSTERY ON THE PLANET OF MACHINES!

"Greetings, friends! If you're watching this, it's because I've experienced an unexpected shutdown—in organic terms, I'm dead."

This strange message invites our intrepid adventurers to Striving, an expansive megaplex city on Aballon, the planet of machines. There, they gather in a neon-lit establishment, surrounded by androids, robots, and aliens of all kinds, to meet an old friend. The bartender brings them refreshments—and a holographic recording from their mutual acquaintance, now dead.

The discovery of their friend's unexpected murder turns these strangers into a crew of unlikely investigators! They'll need to outrun murderous robots, outwit clever foes, and analyze perplexing clues, all while wondering if they're hunting the murderer, or if the murderer is hunting them.

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Printed in China.
PZO24005-BX

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